Radicals in English education, 1960-1980: A critical study

Thesis

RADICALS IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

1960–1980:

A CRITICAL STUDY

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Radicals in English Education 1960-1980: A Critical Study

ABSTRACT

This is an interdisciplinary critical review of the radical movmement in English education (schools) in the 1960s and 1970s. The term 'radical' is defined and the contributing historical currents are analysed. The distinguishing features of this radicalism are identified.

There is a descriptive history of 19 radical teachers' groups, of the school students movement and of the other groups which campaigned for radical changes in education. The ideas and strategies of these groups are examined and discussed.

As examples of radical practice, the 14 free schools which were established in the 1970s are described. The phenomenon of free schooling is investigated under six headings: philosophy; the free school and the community; structures; the place of free schools in society; libertarian non-intervention; and the strategy of free schooling.

Twelve 'radical dilemmas' are identified - issues on which the radicals were unable to reach agreement and which rendered the radical movement a multi-dimensional tendency rather than a unified political movement.

The ideas put forward by the radicals are critically examined in two case studies: one a study of the experience of White Lion Street Free School; the other a study of radical theories of learning. In each case it is suggested that there are flaws in radical thinking which point to a need for more rigorous theoretical work.

Certain themes which were under-developed by radicals are identified. The significance of the radical movement is assessed, and proposals are made for further research.

An appendix lists all the criticisms made of schooling by the radicals in this period.

The bibliography includes a comprehensive list of all the radical literature published in this period.

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Nigel Wright

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INTRODUCTION

If, in the early 1970s, you had gone into an alternative bookshop - Compendium in London, say, or Grass Roots in Manchester - you would have seen displayed more than 20 radical magazines about education, and perhaps 25 or 30 radical pamphlets on education. This thesis is a study of the movement which, in the 1960s and 1970s, generated those publications. It might have been described in this way:

> An outpouring of tracts and pamphlets voicing discontent with prevailing educational conditions and putting forward proposals for reform... Throughout this controversial literature the same proposals and denunciations occur, and often they are only parts of more ambitious schemes for the reformation of society as a whole... In some respects these two decades were propitious for large scale educational advance. The ancient forces of conservatism were temporarily driven underground and new ideas of democracy and equality flourished in an atmosphere of free discussion and debate.

although in fact these words describe the 1640s and 1650s [1]. The radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s is, also, now, a matter of history. In 1987 the two bookshops named above stocked, between them, just two radical magazines on education and no pamphlets at all.

The origins of this study lie in my own personal history, and it will help to explain both the purpose and the construction of the thesis if I describe, quite briefly, that history.

I entered teaching, an 'untrained graduate', in 1968. I cannot recall when, or even why, I decided to become a teacher. Certainly it was no long-standing ambition of mine. Nearing graduation, I found myself applying for a post in an outer London comprehensive school. Offered the job, I accepted it without having much idea of what it would involve and having very few ideas about education. I did not think of myself as a radical at that time. I did not come from a radical background - quite the opposite. At University I had been only casually

interested in politics. But when I started teaching I found myself, without conscious intention, in opposition to many of the things going on in the school. I had grown up in the 1960s, and I had a common bond with the youngsters in that school: the dominant ethos of the school seemed repellant to us. The school, dedicated to the perpetuation of an imaginary society that few of us wanted to live in, seemed so out of touch with the vibrant world of the young.

The term I started teaching was the term which saw the birth of the school students' movement, and I was attracted to the founding conference of the Schools Action Union in 1969. In the same year I was involved in the NUT's 'Interim Award' Campaign [2] which introduced me to trade union militancy and brought me into contact with the newly-formed Rank & File teachers' group. I became an active supporter of Rank & File and, in 1970, moved to an Inner London comprehensive school where I found a strong group of radical teachers who shared my outlook. Together we agitated (an apt word) for radical changes within the school.

In due course I joined the editorial board of *Rank & File*, and put an enormous amount of energy into the activities of that group. At the same time I was avidly reading the burgeoning radical literature - especially the Penguin Education Specials. I became increasingly convinced that what the radical movement lacked was a serious concern for educational theory. I felt increasingly frustrated by Rank & File's emphasis on trade unionism and its lack of concern for educational questions. In 1973 I was removed from the editorial board of *Rank & File*, along with all but one of the other members, after a disagreement about the direction the journal should take.

In 1974 I met up with others who shared my interest in radical theory and together we founded the journal *Radical Education*. At the same time I took a one-year course at the London Institute of Education, which offered me the opportunity both to study 'orthodox' theory of education and to encounter certain contemporary currents such as the 'new sociology'.

But none of this seemed to be much help to radicals trying to make changes in schools. Although I worked hard for change in my school, I found that even where there were 30 or 40 like-minded radicals (by no means all of them young) the task was Sisyphean. Losing patience, I moved north to Lancaster, did a term's supply teaching in a grammar school (for which 'volte face' I was mocked in the *Times Educational Supplement*; the truth was it was the only job I could get and I do not regret the opportunity it gave me to get first-hand experience of a prestigious selective school) and then spent two years writing a critique of the *Black Papers* [3]. I had, in fact, left the editorial group of *Radical Education* after a disagreement about how the *Black Papers* should be confronted.

Short of work again, in 1977 I returned to London to teach in a 'special unit', perhaps confirming that such 'sin bins' for youngsters who didn't fit in to school were staffed by teachers who didn't fit into school either. Like some other radicals, I felt that if change was too difficult to achieve in mainstream schools, perhaps it would begin at the fringes. In 1979 an even better opportunity to explore this possibility arose when I was offered a job at White Lion Street Free School. I wanted to see if a successful radical practice could be developed where many of the constraints which act upon conventional schools were lifted.

I spent a little over four hectic but happy years at White Lion. Towards the end of my time there I was invited by the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain to give a paper on free schooling. I had great difficulty in writing the paper and it was quite feeble. I became convinced that my radical ideas - and the ideas upon which the free school was predicated - were muddled, half thought-out, and in need of much more intensive study than I had ever been able to undertake. In short, I felt it was time to recapitulate. For 15 years I had been a radical activist. Now was the time to pause and see how much of my thinking would stand up to scrutiny. And when I was fortunate enough to be offered a research studentship by the Open University - for which I must record my gratitude - I had the opportunity to do just that. Hence the genesis of this thesis.

This thesis resembles many others, I am told by those who know, in at least one respect: the end product is very different from what was envisaged at the outset. My original research plan can be found as Appendix C, and it is instructive to explain how and why it changed over the four years of the research.

I had the preliminary purpose of documenting the radical movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Initially this was envisioned merely as 'scene setting', but as I collected material and began to present it, I became aware that an account of the movement would be valuable in itself: not least, as I explain in chapter 9, because there is a danger of it being 'forgotten by history'. And so this part of the project expanded and now constitutes the first five chapters of this thesis.

The consequence, of course, was that I was left with very much less time and space for the remainder of my project. My aim had been "to

disentangle the central themes of the radical critique of schooling" and "to examine what validity - if any - these critiques now have, in the light of the accumulated empirical evidence, the developments in educational theory, the changes which have taken place in schools, and the changing social and economic requirements of education." It is hard now to imagine how I could have written those words without realising the enormity of the undertaking. For a start, it proved to be difficult to disentangle the central themes of the radical critique. Although numerous writers have tried to reduce the radical case to a short list of key propositions [4], I have concluded that it is impossible to do so. The radical case consists of a very large number of interlocking propositions [5] each of which needs to be examined on its own merits [6]. Between them, these propositions cover more or less the whole ground of educational theory as it has developed over the centuries. It became clear that the task I had set myself was the writing of an encyclopaedia of educational theory. Moreover, as soon as I looked at any single proposition I realised that it could not be weighed - and declared true or false - by looking at a specific body of evidence, as one might set about confirming one's theory that the car won't start because it is out of petrol. Each proposition dragged in a host of subsidiary questions ranging across philosophy, sociology, history, psychology and so forth.

I was obliged therefore to curtail my original plans. Well into the third year of my work I decided to expand one of my original areas of inquiry - White Lion Street Free School - in order to provide a 'peg' on which to hang an examination of a number of issues which were of central concern to radicals. I chose seven such issues, and wrote seven chapters, each presenting a theoretical issue and looking at the light shed on it by the experience of White Lion. I sent drafts of these

chapters to six people who had been associated with White Lion, inviting their comments. Two did not respond; three responded with numerous suggestions for amendments but no fundamental objections; but the sixth responded with forceful and fundamental objections to much of what I had written. I did not feel able to ignore these objections and opted, for the second time, for a major change of plan. Most of the White Lion material has been eliminated and that which remains is condensed into two chapters (now 6 and 7).

And so it is that chapter 8 - on learning - is the the only chapter which represents the original central purpose of my research - to scrutinise and evaluate the things radicals were saying in the 1960s and 1970s. I offer it as a case study: as an example of the way in which I would have liked to have scrutinised the whole radical case.

The lay-out of my thesis is as follows. In chapter 1 I define radical in various ways. I identify ten historical currents which contributed to the radical movement of the 1960s. I set the movement in education in the context of the broader radicalism of the 1960s. I point out nine characteristics of that radicalism, and ask what kind of people were involved in the radical movement. And I estimate the size of the movement.

Chapter 2 surveys 19 radical teachers' groups which sprung up in the 1960s and 1970s. Along with factual details there is a brief discussion of the ideas of each group and its contribution to the movement. *Libertarian Education* and the Rank & File group are singled out for lengthier treatment, the one because it was the first. and longest running, the other because it was the largest.

Chapter 3 examines the school students' movement and its three main components - the Free Schools Campaign, the Schools Action Union, and the National Union of School Students. The chapter goes on to look at the Children's Rights movement and six other radical education groupings. I then examine briefly the contribution of certain other radical groups which had something to say about education; the deschoolers; and commercial publishing houses.

Chapter 4 is a survey of free schooling in the 1970s. It examines the meaning of the term 'free school' and documents the 14 free schools which were established. I consider the specific practical problems which free schools faced, and show how they were affected by changing climates of thought as the period progressed. I then probe somewhat deeper into free schooling, under six headings: the philosophy of free schools; their relationship with the community; their emphasis on structures; the relationship of free schools to the wider society; the libertarian theory of non-intervention; and free schooling as a strategy.

These first four chapters can be taken together as, primarily, an attempt to record a certain historical episode. Having been actively involved in several teachers' groups and, briefly, in the school students' movement, and in free schooling, the questions I wanted to ask were what were these groups saying, where were they going, and where did they go wrong? We can take it that they *did* go wrong to the extent that none of them, with the single exception of the Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment, came anywhere near to achieving the aims they set themselves. I started out with an underlying empathy with the spirit of the radical movement but with a readiness to look critically at it.

In chapter 5 I explore some twelve 'radical dilemmas' - twelve issues which divided the radical movement. They might be called (with apologies to William Empson) 'twelve ambiguities' because it was not so much that radicals took opposing sides on these issues, but that many radicals, myself included, felt unable to resolve these dilemmas even in their own minds. Individuals had the disconcerting experience of being pulled in opposing directions at the same time. Of course, such an experience is not confined to radicals. It is common amongst classroom teachers in general [7]. Indeed, paradox, inner conflict and ambiguity are recurrent literary themes, indicating that they are forever part of the human condition.

As I have said, chapters 6, 7 and 8 come nearer to my original aim of scrutinising radical ideas - in practice and in theory. My time at White Lion left me unconvinced that free schooling offered answers to the questions which had been raised by my previous experience - questions which may be subsumed into one major question: how are we to educate our children? Chapters 6 and 7 are an attempt to examine the White Lion experiment. There are three major topics: democracy, freedom, and learning. The chapters are not offered as a comprehensive account of White Lion, nor are they offered as the report of a disinterested observer. In some ways they are best thought of as notes towards a fuller research project because, as we shall see, most of the questions I raise are left unanswered for lack of decisive information.

Chapter 8 explores in some depth certain propositions about learning which have been commonly voiced by radicals. Although the chapter has several sub-plots, my chief thesis is that much radical thought (and indeed much non-radical thought) about learning fails to take proper account of the triangular relationship between the child, the content

of learning, and society. In particular, I will be concerned to argue that *motivation* must be understood as a social phenomenon: that to think of motivation merely as an intrinsic characteristic of the individual can be seriously misleading. This is not a 'merely theoretical' point. My starting point is a practical one. For me the chief puzzle posed by White Lion was summed up in a note I made shortly after leaving the school: "The central problem of the free school: the children just didn't want to know". The children (with some exceptions) did not want to learn much that the adults considered worthwhile. I was, and remain, unwilling to ascribe this to some defect in the children. My hypothesis, which I have developed during this research, is that the children's social experience - not just as members of the school and of the local community, but as members of contemporary British society - failed to invest them with any driving sense of purpose in their lives. In my young days I was constantly reminded, when my parents reminisced about the war, of a time when the whole nation was collectively motivated by a clear and powerful sense of purpose. And those memories were rekindled when I was privileged, in 1981, to teach for a short period in the Caribbean island of Grenada. In 1979 the disliked regime of Eric Gairy had been overthrown by popular insurrection, and in the subsequent four years the generality of people were committed to an inspiring joint endeavour: nothing less than the reconstruction of their society. It was the effect of this tumult on the children which struck me most. They were fiercely socially motivated to learn, and I had never experienced anything like it in English classrooms.

In the second part of chapter 8 I examine an attempt by some radicals in the 1970s to show how a similar motivation might be mobilised in British schools: the motivation of working class struggle. I do not

reach any decisive conclusions on this, but discuss the practical and theoretical problems of such a programme.

The final chapter summarises the major themes which emerged in the course of my study and poses a number of questions which need further examination. In the light of the original purposes of this project, these are not the kind of conclusions I had hoped for. I had envisaged being able to say something like 'in this, this and this respect we can say that the radicals were probably right, but on that, that and that we can say with some conviction that they were mistaken'. I have, however, been able to reach very few definite conclusions. The value of this thesis, perhaps, lies not in answering questions but in defining the questions which need to be asked.

METHOD

It remains in this introduction for me to say something about the method of this research and anticipate possible objections. I will first describe how I set about the research and then examine some of the problems which have arisen.

The research fell into six stages, although there was overlap between them. First, all of my experience up until 1983 (when I stopped being a teacher) may be regarded as part of the research programme. Second, I made a full study of the radical literature. This involved a tracking down and examination of all the items listed in section I of the bibliography. Third, there was a period of discussion and interviews with people who had been involved in the radical movement. The fourth stage was the writing of preliminary drafts. Fifth, these drafts were

read by numerous other people and their opinions collected. And, finally, the final version was written.

The second stage - the study of the literature - was the central part of the project. I did not undertake this with any pre-conceived ideas of what I was looking for. I simply read it and noted down whatever came into my head, a process which produced 13 volumes of notes. I also collected every criticism of schooling made by the radicals. This resulted in a card index with some 400 criticisms. On each card I noted the writers who had made the criticisms and the source. Subsequently I have been able to add to these cards earlier statements of the same criticisms dating back through history. This card index has been a valuable product of the research but for reasons of space it cannot be included in this thesis. All I am able to do is summarise the criticisms (whittled down to some 290) and these are presented as Appendix A (page 461). A chapter which put all these criticisms together in the form of a simulated 'radical diatribe' has had to be o mitted for reasons of space.

My review of the radical literature left me with two significant feelings. Firstly, that these writers did have something important and valid to say about education. And, second, that they were saying it badly. Their argumentation was flawed in numerous ways; Robin Barrow has made a study of this [8] and it is difficult to disagree with much of what he says. But because of my inner belief that there was something valid and important in this literature, I determined upon the general approach of trying to show what would need to be done to put the radical case in order. And that is a general *motif* of this thesis. There may be those who read this thesis who believe that nothing could be done to put the radical case in order because it is, fundamentally,

wrong. They could be correct: the challenge to the radicals, as I pose it in the final chapter, is to prove them wrong.

My reading of the radical literature also led me to pursue a number of avenues of enquiry which, alas, could not be included in the thesis. Chief amongst these was the general question of *truth* and, specifically, how can we determine the truth or falsity of assertions made about education? I would have enjoyed writing a thesis on this topic alone. It is, after all, a question which precedes all the other questions asked in this thesis. Suffice to say that I do not claim the status of 'truth' (in any absolute sense) for any of the statements made in this thesis. Rather, I invite others to demonstrate the falsity of what I say.

Nor do I claim the status of 'objectivity' for my thesis. My work belongs to the school of 'new scepticism' described by Liam Hudson in *The Cult of the Fact*. Hudson remarks:

> Given this new scepticism, we are now more sensitive than we were to the polemic and autobiographical sentiments at the heart of work that, until recently, would have passed for the fruits of pure reason.[9]

That is why I have sketched the autobiographical history which is necessary to an understanding of the subjective component of this thesis. I think it would have been correct to provide more such information, but reticence as well as limitations of space prevent me from doing so. Hudson again:

> Such immediate, personal involvement becomes troublesome only when we try to conceal it.[10]

This raises a problem which must be mentioned. Although I have not deliberately tried to conceal my personal involvement in the movement which is the subject of this study, there has been in my mind a continual conflict between a desire to say what I feel about certain

things and a wish to conform to academic propriety (as I conceive it).

One of the people who read my draft chapters about White Lion asked, with some irritation: "But why don't you say what *you* thought, what *you said*, what *you* did there? Why do you conceal your own feelings about it?" It is true, for example, that I have tried to write out of chapters 6 and 7 my own strong feelings of annoyance with, and incomprehension of, those people who believe that the White Lion experiment has been an unmitigated success. In principle I would have wished to acknowledge the dialectic between the inner and the outer - the subjective and the objective - which is at the centre of human experience. To quote Hudson once more:

> ...our shelves sag with works that warn us against any loss of 'objectivity', but scarcely a pamphlet to indicate the far greater, more insidious danger of encapsulation. [11]

By 'encapsulation' I understand Hudson to mean the attempt to build a Berlin Wall between the 'objective' and the 'subjective' realms and insist that they are discrete categories.

Why then have I not followed my inclination to mix my own feelings freely with factual reportage? For one thing, people like me - English, male, middle class, university educated - often find it hard to write about our feelings; we feel safer sticking to the quasi-objective style of writing we were brought up to do. And, for another thing, I understood it to be not the sort of thing one did in a PhD thesis. Perhaps I am wrong, and it may well be that this thesis is the less valuable because it will be difficult for the reader to guess at my own private motivations at each juncture.

And it would be foolish to pretend that there are not private motivations. But, on the other hand, I think this thesis goes beyond

mere subectivism parading as objectivism. I have conducted lengthy interviews with 12 people who were involved in the radical movement, and had shorter discussions with many others. And my drafts have been widely read. Whilst there have been disagreements about specific points, this thesis represents on the whole a measure of intersubjective agreement between those people at least. In short, I have tested my own experience and judgements against those of other people. This, of course, does not make what I have written 'objective', but it makes it something more than eccentrically personal.

There is another reason for asserting that this thesis is not just a purely personal statement. That is, it brings together a lot of ideas that I am by no means the first person to think of. I would stress the *social* generation of ideas: in Percy Nunn's words:

> Philosophers... only give definite form and shape to movements which are stirring vaguely and irresistably in a million minds around them.[12]

The ideas contained in these pages are as much a product of a particular era as of a single mind.

I need now to say a little about the inter-disciplinary nature of this study. As Douglas Holly has argued:

> Education is a problematical study largely because it deals with emergent questions which refuse to be confined within the neat rubric of the conventional academic discipline.[13]

As I mentioned earlier, when one attempts to tackle any practical educational problem, one soon finds that it requires consideration from a number of disciplinary angles: philosophical, sociological, historical, political, and so forth. Moreover, there is an inter-connectedness between different educational questions that makes it difficult to focus on any one of them to the exclusion of others. Sir John Adams put it this way:

> In writing such a book as this, there is little temptation to fall into the water-tight compartment line of error. Inter-connections crop up at every turn. The different chapters can, with difficulty, be kept apart. There appears to be an underlying force making for unity. If the same thought has sometimes to be presented under different aspects, the explanation is to be found in the organic oneness of the subject.[14]

It is becoming common now for writers, from a variety of perspectives, to note that our propensity to split reality into categories is a reflection of the human mind and not of reality.[15]

In the study of education since the 1950s there has been a pronounced tendency to divide that study into clearly defined disciplinary areas. We need not doubt that this has brought benefits of greater rigour and analytical insight. And no doubt it has allowed the development of methodologies which earlier studies lacked. I simply want to query the feeling, which has accompanied these developments, that cross-disciplinary studies are somehow necessarily weaker. Hudson calls this feeling 'tough-mindedness' and I will quote him one more time:

> There is an assumption made by the tough-minded, and to a lesser extent by the rest of us on their behalf, that they are somehow in the right, that those who accept a particular intellectual discipline are, in some subtle respect, legitimate, whereas those who do not are freebooters, or dilettantes.[16]

But I think the danger of 'dilettantisim' is a real one, perhaps more so in the study of education than in other fields. Whereas in, say, nuclear physics, the layperson knows that s/he doesn't know anything about the subject, everyone thinks they know a lot about education. It was the original intention of my project to study the specialist disciplinary literature on each question before presuming to discuss the radical propositions. This would have been the correct approach, but I now feel unsure that any single person could ever undertake such a task. Possibly the way out lies in teams of collaborators, each a

specialist, producing integrative work [17]. No doubt disciplinary specialists could easily find solecisms in this thesis. I only hope they will be kind enough to point them out to me.

I would like to anticipate several other possible objections to this study. We have heard much in recent years of the 'patriarchal values' which inveigle their way into much work on education (and elsewhere). I do not for a moment doubt that this is an important point and that, as a male writer, my work contains examples of unconscious patriarchal assumptions. At this stage I cannot do anything about it.

Next, I accept that this study lacks that dimension which, in chapter 5, I call 'seeing things from the point of view of the child'. This is particularly significant in the chapters about White Lion Street Free School which was, after all, set up to be a children's place. I made no systematic attempt to discover the views of the children on the topics I discuss. Of course, I frequently infer the children's views, but such adult inferring (which is a habit all parents learn before their children acquire speech) is open to all the criticisms which have been made of men who too readily infer the point of view of women. Nothing annoys a feminist more than men who pontificate about 'what women want'; no doubt children have an equal right to object to those of us who talk about what children want. I did in fact give my first draft chapters on White Lion to a youngster who had recently left the school. I am sorry to say that she found them too difficult to read. Given time (which neither she nor I could spare) I might have gone through the chapters, explaining each point and inviting her response. It wasn't possible to do this: the time and work involved would require another research project.

Nor have I been able to do justice to non-rational perspectives on education, about which I will have a little to say in chapter 5. I am reluctant to agree with those who hold that the study of education necessarily belongs exclusively to the rational domain. Again, this was an area demanding time and space which was not available to me.

Some readers of my drafts have suggested that my work is politically and/or theoretically 'ungrounded'. By this they mean that I have not chosen a specific and explicable political or theoretical framework around which to construct my analysis (one such which has been urged on me is Marxism). I accept this, and it raises again the question of where my ideas are coming from. Those who hold that the researcher can be a detached 'free spirit' who disinterestedly looks for the 'truth' ignores the fact that all thought embodies an implicit theory and, it can be argued, political pre-suppositions. I do not suppose I have avoided such problems; by not spelling out a specific political and theoretical 'ground' I have left my theroetical and political presuppositions unexamined. And the real possibility exists that I am operating from unacknowledged presuppositions which are not only varied and open to challenge but which could be contradictory. Once again I can only admit the possibility of this defect. My hope is that the merits of this study outweigh the disadvantages of the methodology.

This study is methodologically eclectic. This is perhaps truest of the section about White Lion Street Free School which resembles participant observation but with the curious feature that this participant made no systematic observation, and kept no systematic records, during the period of his observation. This study draws on elements of autobiography, ethnomethodology, philosophical analysis, documentary analysis, descriptive history and various other

methodologies. My method is not disimilar to that of Willard Waller who wrote:

> ...it is a method of empirical analysis, and it has its first and most important basis in what the writer has seen and thought and done. The only test of such analysis and of the generalisations which come from it is the judgement of other writers who have had equal opporutnity to observe. Although this method is vague and little subject to control, it is the only method available at the present time for pursuing an enquiry of this sort, and we shall endeavour to apply it in as fair-minded a way as possible. Where there seem to be two sides, we shall state both and leave the reader to choose for himself.[18]

For me the central test of the validity of my approach is whether this work will be useful for others. If there are things in the following pages which others can use - for further research, perhaps, or as a springboard for the development of their own ideas or even as material upon which to base a critique, then a purpose will have been served. What I have tried to do in this thesis is to disclose as much as I can about the radical movement. How valuable this is, is for others to judge.

NOTES

1. John Lawson and Harold Silver *A Social History of Education in England* pp 154-157.
2. Vincent Burke *Teachers in Turmoil.*
3. Nigel Wright *Progress in Education.*
4. See, for example, the final chapter of W.A.C.Stewart *Progressives and Radicals in English Education 1750-1970.*
5. See Appendix A.
6. I found exactly the same thing when preparing my critique of the *Black Papers* for *Progress in Education.* At first I had thought to summarise the *Black Paper* case into a number of pithy key propositions.

But I found this to be impossible.

7. Ann Berlak and Harold Berlak *The Dilemmas of Schooling*.

8. Robin Barrow *Radical Education: A Critique of Deschooling and Free Schooling*.

9. Liam Hudson *The Cult of the Fact* page 128/129.

10. *Ibid* page 129.

11. *Ibid* page 153.

12. Percy Nunn *Education: Its Data and First Principles* page 3.

13. Douglas Holly *Society, Schools and Humanity* page 7.

14. Sir John Adams *Modern Developments in Educational Practice* pages 11/12.

15. See for example Fritjof Capra *The Tao of Physics* page 142.

16. Liam Hudson *op cit* page 105.

17. A pioneering example of this approach was the work of the Farmington Trust (see John Wilson, Norman Williams and Barry Sugarman *Introduction to Moral Education*); more recent examples are the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' *Unpopular Education* and various Open University courses in Education.

18. Willard Waller *The Sociology of Teaching* page 381. But, of course, there are other methodologies available now.

CHAPTER 1

THE BACKGROUND

The purpose of this chapter is to set the scene for the remainder of the study. I will paint a thumb-nail sketch of the broader radicalism of which the movement in education was only a part. I will then analyse the historical currents which contributed to the radical movement of the 1960s and 1970s. After that I describe some of the distinguishing characteristics of the radicalism of this period. I will then have some quite brief comments to make about the kind of people who were involved in the radical movement in education and about the size of the movement. But first of all, I must tackle the question of how the term 'radical' may be defined.

DEFINING 'RADICAL'

> What I mean by a radical is one who wants change that involves going to the root of the matter, as opposed to one who wants no change at all, or one who wants superficial change. That is all, and that is precisely what I mean by a radical. [1]

This is how philosopher Robin Barrow defines a radical. Far from being precise, however, his definition leaves open two vital questions: how *much* change is required for it not to be 'superficial'; and just what *are* the roots of the matter? Two people may agree that schooling is suffering a deep malaise but have quite different ideas of the root causes. And one's radical proposals for change may seem quite superficial to the other. Each of the currents described later in this chapter has its own idea of the root of the problem: for Marxists, for

example, it is the capitalist mode of production; for anarchists it is all forms of government; and so on.

Whilst some words may be susceptible to timeless and universal definition (such as 'aluminium' or 'three'), others take on specific meanings for particular groups of people at particular moments in time. Raymond Williams has reviewed the confusing variety of senses in which the word 'radical' may be used, both favourable and pejorative [2]. 'Radical' belongs with a cluster of words - 'reformist', 'revolutionary', 'liberal', 'extreme', 'progressive', 'socialist', 'libertarian', 'left-wing', 'communist', 'innovative', 'dogmatic', 'moderate', 'conservative', 'continuity', 'consensus' - to which it may be related whether by association or opposition.

During the 1960s the word underwent subtle changes of valuation year by year and from place to place. In America it often meant a particulaly vigorous form of liberalism; in Britain, however, it was usually used in opposition to 'liberal'. Between 1966 and 1968 an organisation called the Radical Students' Alliance embraced Young Liberals, British Communists and International Socialists. But in 1968 'revolutionary' became the fashionable word amongst left-wing students (who disbanded the Radical Students Alliance and set up the Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation [3]), and the word 'radical' was used, for a few years, to refer to the non-Marxist left.

There are two ways of defining a word: by its *sense* and by its *reference*. I have quoted Robin Barrow's attempt at the first, and I will not get sidetracked into trying to improve upon it. Instead, I will define the word 'radical', for the purposes of this study, by explaining what I use it to refer *to*. For a start, I am referring to

radicals on the political left. The 'radical *right*' has become familiar to us in the 1980s, although it was in existence in the 1960s [4], but that is not the subject of this study, and nor is the 'radical centre', a peculiar invention of the Social Democratic Party in the 1980s which seems to confound all earlier usages.

More specifically, I am referring to the groups and publications which are described in chapters 2, 3 and 4, and to the radical writings which are listed in the bibliography. Whether they succeeded in 'getting to the roots of the problem' remains an open question.

In the course of this chapter I will sometimes make a distinction between 'radical' and 'progressive', and I shall be doing so again in later chapters. There are many progressive educational publications and organisations (such as *Forum*, *The New Era*, *Education Today and To morrow*, the Programme for Reform in Secondary Education (PRISE), the Socialist Education Association, the Confederation for the Advancement of State Education (CASE), the Campaign for Comprehensive Education) which I have not included within the radical movement. But I do not think that a sharp distinction may be made between 'progressive' and 'radical' - the words describe different stretches of the same continuum and there is considerable overlap. It will be more useful to refer to points of difference as and when they arise in the discussion.

In the remainder of this chapter I hope to make the sense I which I am using the term 'radical' clearer by pointing to the historical traditions with which it is associated and by describing some of the characteristics of the radicals with whom we are concerned.

THE BROADER RADICAL MOVEMENT

The radical movement in education was, of course, only a part of a much broader radical movement which flowered in the late 1960s and early 1970s. There were campaigning radical groups of philosophers, historians, psychologists, scientists, and sociologists; there were radicals in the health service, in architecture, in computers, in the media, in child care, in social work; there were radical economists, radical anthropologists, radical photographers, radical statisticians, radical lawyers and radical criminologists. And there were many radical groups of women, of homosexuals, and of black people [5]. There were very few spheres of established society that did not find themselves under attack from vociferous groups of left-wing critics.

Linking up these specialist groupings were information agencies like *Agitprop*, *Release*, *Rising Free* and the *People's News Service*. There was a vigorous alternative press: *IT* (*International Times*), *Oz*, *Ink*, *Black Dwarf*, *Red Mole*, *Friendz* and *Idiot International*, as well as the papers of the numerous left-wing sects. Particularly diligent in discussing educational questions were the anarchist weekly *Freedom* and monthly *Anarchy*, the pacifist weekly *Peace News* and the radical Christian *Catonsville Roadrunner*.

What all these radicals shared was a contempt for what they saw as the complacency of the 1950s. They shared a long list of criticisms of our society: inequality and class divisions; poverty in the midst of plenty; poor housing; urban decay and regional decline; the evils of 'consumerism' - waste, advertising, a culture increasingly monopolised by commercial interests; the decline of community and the growing privatisation of life; pollution and the destruction of the

environment; growing militarism - nuclear weapons and wars in Vietnam, Guatamala, Algeria; injustice - for example in Northern Ireland; the secrecy and dissimulation of governments; the exploitation of the third world; racism; authoritarianism at all levels of society; sexual repression and hypocrisy; the alienation of youth; the excessive powers of the civil service, the police and the large corporations; the consolidation of centralised power in the corporate state; the denial of working-class values and culture; rampant technology; the cult of the expert; male domination in every sphere of public life; and the inability of established political institutions to tackle these problems.

To talk of '1960s radicalism' is misleading in at least one sense: protest against the things I have just listed was well under way in the 1950s. Consider, for example, the year 1956. In that year imperialism was stripped of its last vestiges of honour when Britain, France and Israel collaborated in the invasion of Suez. At the same moment the supposed antithesis of imperialism - Soviet socialism - was exposed in all its ugliness in Poland and Hungary. Thousands of political radicals who had found their 'natural' expression in the British Communist Party left the CP, and the 'new left' was born. The 'ban the bomb' movement got under way, beginning that fusion of politics and 'the culture of protest' which was to prove such a potent mixture in the following decade. 1956 also saw a seminal development in British arts - John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* opened at London's Royal Court Theatre, and the 'angry young man' (the angry young woman was yet to receive recognition) was launched into society. Angry young men had already been seen on American cinema screens, notably Marlon Brando in Laslo Benedek's *The Wild One* ("much banned because there was no retribution" [6] which seems, to me, to put the finger on an important point.) and

James Dean in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without A Cause*. In 1956 these films were showing in Britain, as was another American film which was of even greater significance in the formation of the 1960s: Fred Sears' *Rock Around the Clock*, whose stars Little Richard, Bill Haley and others had audiences dancing in the cinema aisles and sometimes - in several countries - rioting in the streets. At a more esoteric level, 1956 was the year in which Raymond Williams wrote his important book *Culture and Society*.

1960 was equally a year of significant events. The failed prosecution of D.H.Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover* opened, at a stroke, the door to a great wave of free expression: there was no longer any retribution. The Committee of 100 - the archetypal protest organisation - was formed, and the Labour Party Conference voted for unilateral nuclear disarmament. Meanwhile, cinemas were packed out for Karel Reisz's film of Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* which established three features of the 1960s radicalism - contempt for authority, acknowledgement of the reality of working-class life, and a new attitude to sex. In America liberals who were soon to become radicals were euphoric at the election of John Kennedy to the Presidency. Paul Goodman's influential *Growing Up Absurd* was published in America. In education, a new and firmer strain of progressivism was established with the founding of the journal *Forum*, and a school which was to become a radical *cause célèbre* opened - Risinghill in North London.

From the point of view of a study of the radical movement in education 1966 seems to have been a key year: it saw the first of the radical magazines (*Libertarian Teacher*) which I will be reviewing in the next chapter. In 1966 the 'student revolt' reached England (from

America) and the London School of Economics saw its first student 'sit in' (one of the leaders was an American). In the same year the Radical Students' Alliance - eventually to spawn the Schools' Action Union - was formed as was the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign which mobilised enormous protests against the Vietnam war. The Cultural Revolution in China aroused much interest in Britain, the hippy newspaper *IT* was launched in London, and the Beatles' LP *Revolver* came out, considered by some to mark a major turning point in popular music [7].

Between 1966 and 1968 something important happened: radicals and dissidents began to believe their own rhetoric. They began to believe that it might really be possible to change the world, not just protest about it. The ideas which had been developing over the previous decade quite rapidly took on organisational and strategic forms. 1968 is often mentioned as the key year, politically, of the 1960s, with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia [8] and near revolution on the streets of Paris. But the radical momentum had been building up long before that. If politics is 'the art of the possible' the events of May 1968 in Paris seemed to confirm that it was possible to mount a challenge to the corporate state. But May 1968 was to the radical movement what the Plowden Report (of 1967) was to progressive education - not the start of something new but confirmation that something new was well under way. History is rarely made by *an* event, or *a* person, or *a* discovery. Events, persons, or discoveries only attain significance if the climate is right for them; often enough, they then take on a symbolic significance; but this mustn't be confused with the real causality.

If we are to understand educational radicalism correctly, we must see it as a confluence of many currents of ideas which had years, decades, and sometimes centuries, of history behind them. I want to identify ten of these antecedents and I will discuss them roughly in order of their historical origin.

THE ENGLISH RADICAL TRADITION

Several historians have studied the radical tradition in English education [9]. It belongs to a broader tradition of radicalism which dates back to the English revolution and before [10]. What did the educational radicals of the 1960s and 1970s owe to that tradition? On the surface of it, the answer to that question would seem to be 'not much'. You will search in vain through the radical educational writing of the 1960s and 1970s to find any mention of Godwin, Paine, Carlile, Thompson or Lovett. William Morris and Robert Owen were occasionally mentioned, but not seen as pregenitors of the current ideas.

But to look for direct acknowledgements in the literature is perhaps to miss the point. I would suggest that the stage was set for the radical movement by four books - Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1959) and *The Long Revolution* (1961), and Dennis Marsden and Brian Jackson's *Education and the Working Class* (1962). All of these writers belong squarely to the English radical tradition [11] and in a real sense they set the agenda for the radical movement in education. The themes they discuss arise over and over again in the period. Their influence on the intellectual climate in which the movement emerged was enormous, as was the work of

a number of historians, notably Christopher Hill, Brian Simon and E.P.Thompson.

It would require a major study of its own to disentangle the routes by which elements of the radical tradition influenced education in the period we are discussing. I will point only to one well-known example, the influence which F.R.Leavis and Denys Thompson had on the teaching of English with their book *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*. Teachers of English were in the forefront of radicalism in schools in the 1970s, and the magazine *Teaching London Kids* belongs in some ways to the Leavis and Thompson tradition. And as we shall see in chapter 8, the concept of 'critical awareness' was revived in a contemporary guise in the 1970s.

In his introduction to *The Radical Tradition in Education in Britain* [12] Brian Simon identifies five characteristics of that tradition as it developed in the 19th century. They are, first, an emphasis on the formative power of education; second, an emphasis on science and scientific education as the road to truth; third, insistence that the totality of social influences, including those of political institutions, are and must be educative; fourth, emphasis on a secular education based on rationalism, and emphasis on development of a secular morality; fifth, an emphasis on the role that knowledge and education could play in social change.

The first of these has remained the subject of intense educational debate throughout this century. It is at the basis of the debates about intelligence, selection and comprehensive schooling - debates in which Brian Simon himself has been centrally involved. It is fair to say that by the mid-1960s the *debate* had effectively been won (by those who

stressed the formative power of education) although there has followed an interminable rear-guard action by the losers. The belief in the formative power of education has now entered educational orthodoxy, and whilst the radicals of the 1960s and 1970s accepted it, the belief itself was no longer innovative.

The question of science and scientific education as the road to truth became freshly controversial in the 1960s. As Liam Hudson put it:

> Science is no longer accepted uncritically as the expression of Progress, as the cutting edge of our civilisation's fight with ignorance. Its pursuit is seen as dangerous, even lethal - and its devotees are suspected, not entirely unfairly, of substituting one system of supersitition for another.[13]

The atomic bomb, the destruction of the environment, nuclear power, 'high-technology' medicine - to give just four examples - revealed a face of science which was unacceptable to radicals. Some turned (though not, I think, many in education) to mysticism; others launched an attack on the spurious objectivity (as they saw it) of science [14] or urged a re-assertion of subjectivity. For such reasons, an emphasis on science was not a characteristic of the radical movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, this question of the attitude to science was one of the things which divided 'radicals' from 'progressives' in this period. Progressives, in general, retained a faith in science and, particularly, a confidence that progressive educational ideas could be shown to be *right* by objective, scientifically based, educational research.

The third feature of radicalism identified by Simon was the insistence that the totality of social influences must be educative [15]. This was indeed a feature of the 1960s and 1970s radicalism, having been placed firmly on the agenda at the start of the decade by Raymond Williams in England and Paul Goodman in America [16]. By 1971

it reached an illogical conclusion, and was turned on its head, when the de-schoolers declared that "all over the world the school has an anti-educational effect on society".

Like his first, Simon's fourth point - the emphasis on a secular education based on rationalism - no longer seemed particularly radical, although it does remain an issue in British education [17]. The fifth characteristic of the older radical tradition - the emphasis on the role that knowledge and education could play in social change - was, defined broadly, integral to the post-war progressive consensus. However, it was re-habilitated in the early 1970s from three distinct sources. One was the renewed interest of historians in the working class self-education movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries [18]. The second was the conception of education as social action which I will discuss in chapters 4 and 8. And the third was the revolutionary educational programme of Paulo Freire [19].

Thus certain lines of thought from the older radical tradition did re-emerge in the 1960s, whilst others did not. Although it is difficult to be clear about this, it may be that the older tradition was somewhat overwhelmed by the variety of other influences which I describe on the following pages. A distinctive feature of English radicalism - its commitment to a 'common culture' - was all but lost in the iconoclasm of the late 1960s, to the chagrin of some [20].

It would be a mistake to equate the radical tradition with socialism, not only because it pre-dates socialism, but also because that would be to ignore the strong current of radical liberalism conspicuous in the 1960s in the form of the Young Liberals, who were active in the radical education movement.

THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT [21]

In the early 1960s several books appeared which disclosed the important part which education had played in the early development of the working class movement [22]. The fact of the appearance of these books at that time is significant, because it reflected a heightened awareness of the relationship between class and education. This was also occupying the attention of sociologists of education at that time, who produced abundant evidence that schooling discriminated between children of different class backgrounds [23].

Since the 1830s there has been a fundamental division of opinion within the working class movement. In the words of G.D.H.Cole:

> Either education is a by-product of class, and each class must build up its own educational philosophy and practice to suit the needs of the class struggle - that is, as long as class divisions persist - or, alternatively, education rests on fundamental values which transcend class differences (though not uninfluenced by them), and stands for a social heritage which is to be developed and transmitted to coming generations rather than uprooted and replaced ... In Great Britain, where Marxism as a social philosophy has never struck deep roots, the Socialist tradition is mainly on the side of the second view. [24]

Ken Jones [25] has argued that the first view - that education must be organised for use as a weapon in the class struggle - was decisively defeated in the 1920s. Certainly in the post-war period the official Labour movement (the Labour Party and the Trades Unions) has adhered to the second view.

Both views can be found in the radical movement of the 1960s, although with the revival of Marxism, in 1968, the first view enjoyed a new popularity. Theories which had sought to explain working class educational failure in terms of some inherent deficit in working class children (low intelligence, cultural deprivation etc.) or in

organisational barriers to 'equality of opportunity' (bi-partite schooling, streaming) were ousted by new theories which viewed schooling as a concrete mechanism for keeping the working class 'in its place'. Radicals took up the new theories, often proclaiming that they were the only ones who recognised the true interests of working class people.

As we shall see in chapter 5, radicals were divided between those who held that the chief evil of schooling was its discrimination against working class children, and those who held that schooling damaged all children regardless of their class origin. The latter view was more common in America, the former in Britain: with few exceptions, the groups of the radical movement which I will be describing in chapters 2, 3 and 4 located themselves consciously within the working-class movement. This was, at once, a source of strength and a source of weakness. The strength came from the fixed reference points within which ideas could be expressed, a framework which provided a sense of being part of a continuing historical process - a sense of being part of something bigger. This was an advantage which British radicals had over their American counterparts. But the weakness lay, as I shall argue later, in the romantic illusions which in the end prevented radicals from finding a realisable way forward - the illusion, for example, that the working class would flock to the radical banner as soon as it was raised.

Many radical teachers held that teachers were themselves workers and as such should play an active part in the trade union movement. This was, for example, the orientation of the Rank & File group. But whether teachers really were working class remained an unresolved debate: one view was that the ambiguous class position of teachers meant that to be

with the working class, or not, was a matter of personal choice [26]. This was perhaps a choice more easily made by teachers who had themselves come from a working class background.

MARXISM

When Cole wrote (in 1952) that "Marxism as a social philosophy has never struck deep roots" in Britain, he could not have forseen the revival of Marxism with the founding, just a few years later, of the *New Left Review*, and its explosion into student politics (and thence elsewhere) in 1968.

Until 1968 the Marxist analysis of education was peculiarly sterile, keeping usually to the well-worn paths and often finding itself in broad agreement with the liberal educational establishment. But 1968 unleashed a new wave of critical examination of schooling by people who used the techniques of Marxist analysis. At first much of the writing was simplistic or incoherent: the problem was that Marxism is a sophisticated and difficult theoretical field. It is not taught as a full-time course in any British college or university (although it does form an element in some courses) and so there were few people with an adequate grasp of Marxist theory, and few of these were interested in schooling. The field was wide open to anyone who had read a few chapters of Marx to start elaborating their 'Marxist' analysis of education. This they did in large numbers. Even when academics started to apply Marxist concepts to the sociological analysis of education in the 1970s, their grasp of sociological theory was rarely matched by their grasp of Marxian theory (or vice versa). Ironically, it was the United States (where the Marxist tradition is weak) which produced the

first book which attempted a rigorous new Marxist analysis of schooling - Bowles and Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America*, although the new Marxism had influenced earlier British writers [27].

Notwithstanding, certain Marxist ideas excerised a powerful influence on the radical movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. In particular, Marxism provided the structure for a radical *class* analysis of schooling, which I will have cause to discuss at several points in the following chapters.

ANARCHISM

Modern anarchism has a history dating back 150 years, but it has never had the mass following in Britain which it attained in Southern Europe in the 60 years before the Spanish Civil War. Nevertheless, it has been a tenacious tradition in Britain, kept alive by the paper *Freedom* which in 1986 celebrated its centenary year. Michael Smith has traced the anarchist tradition in European education back to Godwin [28] and anarchists were actively involved in the radical movement which is the subject of this study. The monthly journal *Anarchy*, edited by Colin Ward, played an important role from 1961 onwards in proselytising the radical ideas which were to arouse wider interest some years later. It was anarchists who established the first radical educational journal, *Libertarian Teacher*. Although A.S.Neill (of whom I will have much to say in this study) never considered himself an anarchist, it was amongst anarchists that his ideas found their keenest adherents. And anarchists were closely involved in the first school students' unions (see chapter 3).

Much of the thinking of the radical movement had connections with anarchist thought, as will become clear in later chapters. And yet the part played in the radical movement by avowed anarchists was a limited one. They were divided on important issues - whether or not to involve themselves in state schooling and, after 1970, whether to support de-schooling. They eschewed the organisational skills of socialists and were therefore never able to establish a clear anarchist presence in either the actions or the debates of the movement. But Malatesta's notion of 'the propaganda of the deed' was embodied in all the radical movements of the 1960s - for example in the Schools Action Union's invasion of Dulwich College in 1969 (see page 131).

It was Colin Ward who first introduced the idea of de-schooling, in 1965 [29]. When talking of anarchism and education one thinks of Herbert Read (especially perhaps his *Education Through Art*) but, as we shall see, his brand of genteel anarchism did not find favour with the younger radicals of the 1960s [30]. The most important anarchist contribution to the radical educational literature was Keith Paton's *The Great Brain Robbery* - an archetypal product of the movement, both in form and content. It remains one of the more interesting documents of the period.

PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

The modern progressive movement in education - a world-wide phenomenon - dates from the 'New Education' of the 1890s [31] although of course its roots go further back, to Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel. The movement has had two discernible strands in Britain: the

independent progressive schools on the one hand, and the progressive movement within the maintained sector on the other.

Much has been written about the independent progressive schools, although to my knowledge there is no definitive study [32]. Although these schools had a sense of belonging to a single movement [33] there were considerable differences between them. But all were fee-paying schools (except for some of those which specialised in taking problem children) and therefore provided only for the children of wealthy parents. The specific contribution of this tradition to the radical movement was that their form was partially adopted by the free schools (see chapter 4). More broadly, these schools 'carried the flag' of progressivism right up until the last war. Significantly no independent progressive schools (with the exception of Epping House) were established between 1940 and 1965. After 1940 the other strand of progressivism had taken over.

The course of progressivism within the state sector is more difficult to chart because, apart from schools which have attracted special attention - such as Sompting Village School, Prestolee Village School, St. George's in the East, Braehead and Risinghill [34] - the development was gradual, influencing many schools in varying degree. The Plowden Report, of course, remains the authoritative documentation of this up until 1967 as far as primary schools are concerned: it estimated that one-third of primary schools could, at that time, be called 'progressive' [35]. The development of progressivism in secondary schools was less certain.

There were links between the two strands of progressivism, notably in the New Education Fellowship and its journal *The New Era*. However,

there was also tension between the two strands, centring on the issues of elitism and privilege. This tension was explored at a colloquy at Dartington in 1965:

> A colloquy? Rather a confrontation! For what began as an intended meeting of minds between two groups each considering themselves to be educational progressives ended in an irreconcilability of attitudes that was distressing, perplexing and ominous.[36]

From 1960 the banner of progressivism within the state sector was carried by *Forum* magazine, and many of the ideas it championed were taken up by the radical movement at the end of the decade. *Forum* however did not jump on the radical bandwagon, remaining aloof from what it might have termed the 'ultra-leftism' or 'anarchism' of the radicals. Progressivism had established a base camp (itself too high for many people) from which the radicals set out to scale new heights (or plumb new depths in the view of some). We can say with confidence that if the progressive movement had not existed, there would have been no radical movement in the 1960s.

W.A.C.Stewart [37] has summarised the recurrent emphases of progressivism. They are: the outdoor and rural life; art, music and crafts; mental health, honesty and frankness; informality in relationships and clothing; against punishment; liberal individualism; freedom rather than restraint; responsiveness and spontaneity; emotions as well as intellect; the unconscious mind; reaction against the experience of war; the school as a community; diluted, if any, religion. These are themes which recur throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

We cannot leave even this brief discussion of progressivism without mentioning the great influence of John Dewey and also the significant (if 'low profile') contribution to the continuity of the tradition by humanist and rationalist organisations in England, such as C.E.M.Joad's

Progressive League, the National Secular Society, the British Humanist Association, and the South Place Ethical Society whose Conway Hall in London has been a meeting place for radicals and progressives for many decades.

EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism was a less important influence on the radical movement, but it was clearly there in the writings of Paul Goodman, George Dennison and Paulo Freire, in the political philosophy of Herbert Marcuse - 'guru' of the 1960s student revolt - and in its seminal influence on humanistic psychology, of which more shortly. Existentialism is also related to the philosophical school of phenomenology, in which sociologists of education found renewed interest in the 1970s and manifested in journals like *Hard Cheese*. The existentialist concepts of 'authenticity' and 'commitment' can often be found in radical writings of this period.

THIRD WORLD LIBERATION

It might seem anachronistic to include 'third world liberation' in a list of influences on a radical movement in the world's oldest industrial society. And yet a consciousness of what the imperial powers and industrial economies had done, and were still doing, to third world countries loomed large in the minds of radicals and constituted one of the major (and one of the more morally credible) motivations of their radicalism. We may start by recalling that protest against the Vietnam war brought millions of young people in North America, Australasia and

Europe into radical political activity. We might remember too the ubiquitous poster of Che Guevara. And there was great interest in China: followers of Mao Tse Tung were an appreciable element in the radical movement, especially in the Schools Action Union. Frantz Fanon strongly influenced certain radical writers (such as Paulo Freire and Chris Searle), and both Freire and Ivan Illich had the concerns of the third world at the centre of their educational arguments.

Nor should we overlook the relationship between third world liberation movements and the struggle against racism in the cosmopolitan countries. The Black Power movement was a strong influence on radical politics in America, where activists like Eldridge Cleaver, Stokely Carmichael, George Jackson, Angela Davis and Malcolm X were cult figures for white as well as black radicals; they are often quoted in the radical education literature [38]. In Britain it took the radical movement much longer to adopt the struggle against racism as a central concern.

Finally, we might note that the term 'cultural imperialism', coined to describe the process by which oppressed peoples have their culture and interests marginalised, was taken up by radical educationists to refer to an analogous process operating on children and young people [39].

HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

A quite different, but no less powerful, current was the humanistic psychology movement which developed in America in the 1960s and then crossed the Atlantic. Therapeutic psychologies had had an influence on earlier generations of radicals: psychoanalysis, for example, on Homer

Lane, Susan Isaacs and A.S.Neill; or the 'life adjustment' movement of the 1940s and 1950s. And the writings of Wilhelm Reich enjoyed a renewed popularity in the 1960s.

But humanistic psychology marked a distinctive departure from these older traditions [40]. Its most prominent protagonists in America were Abraham Maslow, Eric Fromm and Carl Rogers, all of whom had a good deal to say about education [41]. Fromm had written an introduction to A.S.Neill's *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* (on the insistence of Neill's American publisher: Neill was not happy about Fromm) which was published in England in 1962. But the real impact of humanistic psychology in Britain came with its adoption by the women's movement on the one hand, and the attack on orthodox psychotherapies led by Ronald Laing on the other. Humanistic psychology drew attention to the importance of the emotions and of personal relationships, and emphasised client-led therapy (analogous with 'child-centred' learning). It influenced the radical education movement by suggesting new organisational forms and more intimate emotional relationships between the people involved. Its influence was also evident in the children's rights movement [42], and on the Resources Programme for Change in Teaching (see page 113) which included 'encounter group' methods in its meetings: they urged that teachers needed to *know themselves* if they were to be truly radical.

But humanistic psychology was more significant in this period in America than in Britain. Gestalt therapy was a strong influence on both Paul Goodman and George Dennison, and a seminal journal, *Issues in Radical Therapy*, was widely read. (It reached Britain in only small numbers but a few of its articles were reprinted and sparked off important discussions within the radical movement.)

Humanistic psychology was anathema to the left-wing sects involved in the radical movement. They perceived, accurately, that it was an exclusively middle-class phenomenon and concluded (not logically) that it had no relevance for the working class struggle. But its implications for pupil-teacher relationships were recognised [43] and its ideas about the conditions of learning were taken up by the free schools.

THE COUNTER CULTURE

I use the term 'counter culture' as a generic term for the unprecedented goings-on that no-one failed to notice in the 1960s, ranging from rock and roll, hippies, flower power, LSD and marijuana, protest songs, brown rice, the sexual revolution, and 'the underground' to *Oh Calcutta!*, *Easy Rider* and Arts Labs [44]. I will not attempt an analysis of all this, but merely observe that it created a climate which was favourable to the radical movement in education: a climate of iconoclasm, of daring to challenge taboos and orthodoxy, of permissiveness, of cultural renewal, of fun for its own sake, of 'doing it' as Jerry Rubin urged.

It is worth making the distinction (although there are obvious interconnections) between the radical counter culture on the one hand and the commercial fashion boom dubbed 'the swinging sixties' on the other. As has often been remarked, the 1960s saw a sharp increase in the spending power of youth and there were rich pickings to be had (notably in the record industry and the clothing trade). What characterised the *radical* counter culture was that it was all run on a shoestring amidst the conspicuous opulence typified by John Schlesinger's film *Darling*.

Amongst the currents which combined to form the counter culture I will pick out four for their relevance to educational radicalism. The first is expressionism, which entered radical educational thought both through the writing of Paul Goodman (Goodman had been involved in founding the Living Theatre which, in the 1960s, epitomised expressionism in drama) and through its well-known influence on the teaching of art, drama and English. Second, and related to this, is a radical individualism which, in Raphael Samuel's words "made personal identity and individual self-assertion the highest good" [45]. Such individualism was compatible with some elements of the radical movement - such as libertarianism and free schools - but came into sharp conflict with others - particularly Marxism and the working clas movement.

Third, there was the interest in mysticism and other non-rational modes of experience; this influence may be perceived in, amongst other things, the fashion for 'gurus' and the commitment of most radicals to non-violence, especially in their dealings with children [46]. The books of Carlos Castaneda found their way on to some College of Education reading lists, bringing forth an indignant response from Rhodes Boyson who muddled up Castaneda's Don Juan with the European legendary rake of the same name. The 1960s was not the first time that Eastern religions had made an impact on progressive educators: Edmond Holmes, author of the 1911 classic *What Is and What Might Be* had been strongly influenced in that direction.

Fourth, we must mention English romanticism (although it might have been subsumed in the English radical tradition), exemplified by the widespread interest in William Blake, William Wordsworth and William Morris. One of the chief charges made against William Tyndale teacher

Brian Haddow was that he had written a verse of Blake on the blackboard: the learned Dr. Boyson recognised it instantly as a thought of Chairman Mao. Several radicals have told me that Wordsworth's *Prelude* was a key influence. Historically, what the romantics gave to education was their repudiation of the idea of the 'natural depravity' of the child, replacing this ancient tenet with a positive optimism about the potentialities of children [47].

We must remember that the counter culture won the allegiance of only a minority even of the generation most affected by it - those who were teenagers in the 1950s and 1960s. It would be inaccurate to think of the radical movement as an integral part of the counter culture [48]: most of those involved in radical education were not wholehearted a ficionados of the counter culture, although of course they could not help being influenced by it. The radical movement in education was, simply, more *serious* than the counter culture tended to be. It had to be, because looking after children inevitably imposes a serious discipline on adults. Some hippies did work as teachers in schools, but were more often driven out by the children than sacked for non-conformity. The counter culture's interest in education was exemplified by the notorious *Schoolkids Oz* [49] whose editors were prosecuted in 1971 on the charge of 'conspiring to debauch and corrupt the morals of children and young persons within the realm and to arouse and implant in their minds lustful and perverted desires'. *Oz* combined high anarchism with a prurient interest in teenage sexuality which commended itself to few radical activists: Neill called it 'sick' [50]. A distinction must be made between the radical support for the sexual emancipation of the young [51] and *Oz*'s 'Jail Bait of the Month' pin-ups.

Having said that, it is unlikely that the radical movement in education would have emerged so clearly had it not been for the social and cultural upheaval of the 1960s which the counter culture represented.

THE AMERICAN INFLUENCE

It would be impossible to leave this account of the contributing currents without referring to the enormous American influence on the radical movement. This influence ranges from books (most of the Penguin 'Education Specials' came from America) and films [52] through to the changing social customs of the 1960s, of which the increasing use of first names (rather than surnames) is a good example. Several radicals have mentioned the formative influence of American science fiction. I have often been struck, too, by the persistence of an anthropological perspective in American thinking about education [53] which had its impact in Britain.

The influence, it should be noted, was not entirely one-way. American radical thinking was strongly swayed by (somewhat idealised) descriptions of what was happening in English primary schools in the 1960s [54]. But in general the cross-Atlantic breeze was westerly, and brought us such arche typal phenomena as student rebellion, the 'alternative society' and free schools.

I have attempted in the preceding pages to trace some of the elements which went to make up the radical movement in education. The number of currents is striking, and so is their variety. It is clear that these

influences are not homogeneous and there is a degree of incompatability between some of them. The English radical tradition has an uneasy relationship with Marxism; humanistic psychology cuts no ice with the working class movement. Anarchists and Marxists fight on the same side in some civil wars (Spain) and on opposite sides in others (eg Russia after 1917). Some radicals were contemptuous of the counter culture. (Consider for example Paul Goodman's scathing critique of beatniks in *Growing Up Absurd*).

Small wonder, then, that the radical movement sometimes appeared less a movement than a pot-pourri of squabbling factions entering into temporary and uneasy alliances for campaigning purposes; and small wonder that (as we shall see) no coherent general analysis of education emerged. And yet I want to insist that it was a *movement* for the simple reason that it was experienced as such by the people involved at the time. I will return to the question of how legitimate it is to talk in terms of *the* radical movement in chapter 9.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RADICALS

I want now to describe nine characteristics of the radicals of the 1960s and 1970s. They are: challenging assumptions; oppositionism; commitment and activism; generalisation; concern for structures; principle; idealism; strategic outlook; and irrefutability. I do not suggest that only radicals have such characteristics; nor do I suggest that every radical had all of these characteristics. What I am saying is that, taken as a cluster, they allow us to identify radicalism as something distinct from, say, 'liberalism' or 'modernism'.

CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS

The radicals were intent on looking behind appearances and questioning common assumptions:

> Genuine change... is not just a matter of modifying or even dismantling traditional structures; it is also a question of rejecting the dominant assumptions which underpin them, and evolving alternative definitions of what is possible [55]

Until the mid-1960s educational thinking in Britain was dominated by a consensus of assumptions, widely agreed and clearly articulated [56]. The radical attack on these assumptions was iconoclastic (indeed, with the arrival of de-schooling in 1970 the iconoclasm was complete). A typical example comes from A.S.Neill's response to parental anxiety about their children learning to read:

> Parents ask ... "if my son cannot read at twelve, what chance has he of success in life ..." But I have learned to wait and watch a child make little or no progress. I never doubt that, in the end, if not molested or damaged, he will succeed in life. Of course, a philistine may say, "Humph, so you call a lorry driver a success in life!" My own criterion of success is the ability to work joyfully and live positively. [57]

Neill is questioning here conventional assumptions about the kind of success schooling is expected to prepare children for, as well as the age at which children should learn to read.

One technique for challenging assumptions is to *describe the ordinary*. This was the technique of 'kitchen sink drama' and 'social realism' in various art forms. The effect of this is to make us conscious of things we already 'knew' but weren't conscious of; once we are conscious of them we may begin to look critically at them. Ken Loach's film *Kes* (1969) was an example which made a considerable public impact; and the technique was used to some effect in the radical educational literature [58].

In the early 1970s questioning taken-for-granted assumptions became part of the methodology of the 'new sociology of education' [59], posing, for example, some interesting questions about what is commonly understood by 'knowledge' [60].

But there is a danger for radicals in their desire to undermine accepted assumptions: communication can break down (I will have a little more to say about this in chapter 9). Communication of any kind depends upon a host of shared assumptions: indeed, that is what makes language work. If too many assumptions are rejected, an unbridgeable gulf can be created between those who reject the assumptions and those who do not. This may help to explain another feature of the radicals in this period. Here was a sizeable group of people who were having intense discussions amongst themselves, but there was precious little communication across the divide which separated them from the 'unconverted' masses. This was brought home to many radicals in a personal way: they found it extremely hard to communicate with their parents and it was common for radicals to have difficult relationships with their families.

OPPOSITIONISM

Related to this questioning of assumptions was a stance of wholesale opposition to society which spurned any attempts to 'prop up the system'. Radicals did not see it as their role to participate constructively in society in order to make it work better. Thus Colin and Mog Ball announced at the start of their book *Education for a Change*: "This book is not about injections for survival, it is about administering a fatal dose." [61].

The word 'underground' was sometimes applied to the counter culture of the 1960s (and it was sometimes used to describe the radical movement in education although I doubt whether many participants welcomed the label). It alludes, of course, to the French resistance to the Nazis, and there was in the radical movement a sense of being 'outsiders' - both in politics and lifestyle - from mainstream society. It was a firm impression of mine at the time that the radical movement contained a high proportion of people who were, by background, Catholics, Quakers, Jews, Methodists or Irish - people who had, by upbringing, learnt to think of themselves as 'different' in some way. There is perhaps a connection here with the dissenting tradition.

In an article which accurately captured the spirit of oppositionism, Harry Rée wrote

> Although in favour of social reform, they just could not see themselves supporting, from positions of power, institutions or a system which they had learned to despise... "Ohne mich!", once the theme of post-war radical students in Germany, became their response to any call to participation in established forms of government. [62]

'Established forms of government' included, as Rée points out, positions of responsibility in local government and schools. Certainly few radicals sought positions of power, and those who did were vulnerable (as the experience of Michael Duane and Robert Mackenzie showed: see page 120). Radical teachers in schools walked a tight-rope between doing their best for the children and supporting the established powers. Although surprisingly few were sacked (England was tolerant in those days and, besides, there was a labour shortage), many more sacked themselves.

We can see a distinction here between radicals and progressives: progressives *did* seek positions of power. Their strategy was to

increase the number of progressive schools by increasing the numbers of progressive headteachers; radical teachers, on the whole, did not want to be headteachers - rather they wanted to abolish the role of headteacher.

There is only a narrow borderline between the oppositionism of which I am talking and a conditioned nihilism which can be destructive. The latter fails to make a proper distinction between those types of accomodation which must necessarily be made between people in any civil society, and those social relationships which may legitimately be targeted for change. This is a matter I will return to in following chapters.

Let us leave the last words (for the time being) on oppositionism to E.P. Thompson:

> The "oppositional" mentality of the British Left is certainly a limiting outlook; but is has grown up simply because our Left has had so bloody much to oppose. [63].

COMMITMENT AND ACTIVISM

The radicalism I am describing here involved moral commitment. It was more than a theory, a set of beliefs, or a particular perspective on the facts. It involved a passionate belief that certain things were wrong and ought not to be happening *and that* public action must be taken to deal with this. It perceived as one of its chief obstacles the apathy and quietism into which people were lulled by contemporary society [64]. It complained of the supposedly increasing tendency for people to respond to public social ills by finding private solutions.

Being an activist movement, it was dismissive of academics and, (rather more unfortunately, as I shall argue in chapter 9) of 'mere theorising'. Actually, 'hyperactivist' might be a more appropriate description, for the sheer pace at which many radicals pursued their causes was extraordinary. They were in a hurry - hence the chant, so often heard on demonstrations: "What do we want? ..... When Do we want it? *Now!*"

GENERALISATION

> It has become hard to talk seriously about schools any more, even with people who work on or in them, without finding soon that the subject of the talk has somehow moved out of the school building. [65]

An essential element of educational radicalism was that it insisted on the relationship between education and the wider society. In Brian Simon's words

> The radical tradition in education is, then, that tradition which sees educational change as a key aspect (or component) of radical social change.[66]

When radicals pointed to a fault in schooling, they tried to show how it related to a fault in society. A number of writers suggested that this marked out radicals from progressives:

> Libertarian education has a consistent social and political reference which progressive education typically lacks. [67]

and

> ...progressives have made an incomplete analysis of the relationship between school and society.[68]

The argument here is that the progressive critique was formulated without any *necessary* reference to a critique of society. Its case was justified on 'educational grounds', implying that these grounds were independent of social and political considerations. For example, progressives criticised streaming on the grounds that it hindered the educational progress of some pupils. Radicals, in contrast, regarded

streaming as a manifestation within schools of a stratified and class-divided society.

I think it may be unfair to accuse progressives of being unaware of the social and political implications of their position; and yet, they were often uneasy about this. That great progressive W.B.Curry of Dartington wrote in 1934

> ...we find ourselves departing, for purely educational reasons, from the tradition that marks and competition are necessary in order to secure an adequate standard of effort and industry... [69]

'For purely educational reasons' is a curious phrase to use in the light of this paragraph just two pages earlier in the same book:

> On the sociological side there is a perception of the fact that, if Western civilisation is not to perish, certain political changes both within and without the state are necessary, and that the point of view inculcated in the traditional schools constitutes an obstacle to these changes. With Mr.H.G.Wells we believe that the alternative to disaster for mankind is the deliberate creation of a cosmopolitan co-operative commonwealth. [70]

More recently we find Brian Simon arguing against streaming in these terms:

> How to group children in schools is primarily an educational question, to be decided on educational grounds... certainly research into psychology, sociology and even anthropology may be relevant and research findings should be taken into account.[71]

If progressives sometimes seemed to lend their weight to the calls to 'keep politics out of education', radicals were quite clear that this was a nonsense since politics was already, and had always been, deeply involved in education:

> Not only must politics not be taken out of education - it can't be. Nor can education be taken out of politics: they are mutually inextricable and each is bound up with society. [72]

Of course, there was an element of strategy in the progressives' inclination to separate politics and education. The progressive movement drew support from across the political spectrum (one only needs to remember Edward Boyle, who, it is not always recollected, was

the Conservative Minister of Education who set up the Plowden Committee). To have placed emphasis on the political implications of progressivism would have splintered the movement [73]. For radicals, however, politics were of crucial importance, and they refused to put them to one side.

STRUCTURES

Radicals tried to aim their critiques at structures - at systems, at 'the system' - rather than at people or their attitudes. Whereas Edmond Holmes had said

> Sensuality, drunken-ness, ill-temper, selfishness, vanity, greed, dishonesty, class jealousy and hatred, national jealousy and hatred, are widespread and persistent evils which are responsible for much of the misery that afflicts mankind. [74]

and argued for an education which would cure people of these propensities, the radicals saw these evils as being the product of social structures. (Thus people are driven to drink as an escape from the misery of life under capitalism; selfishness and greed are the concomitants of a system based on competition and the private ownership of property, and so on). There was no point, therefore, in trying to educate people out of these propensities: they needed, rather, to be educated to fight and change the system which nourished such evils. As Robin Barrow notes, the radicals' work "is imbued with the characteristically Platonic idea that no-one willingly does wrong" [75]. The radicals of the 1960s therefore broke with a very old idea: as Robert Owen had put it "Education could make everyone good, wise and happy." [76]. Lady Byron had expressed the same idea:

> There is a growing conviction that the great antidote to vice and crime, and therefore to political disturbances, is to be found in an improved moral education in the mass of the people.[77]

Put that way, it's not surprising that radicals disagreed: they were all in favour of 'political disturbances'.

It may be that this is another issue which divides radicals from progressives. Keith Paton suggested that "progressive education keeps its criticisms confined to attitudes. Libertarians see how important structures are for spoiling or improving attitudes" [78]. On the other hand, Marxists, holding that there is a dialectical relationship between man (and woman) and society, would perhaps see a false dichotomy here. If "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" [79] there would seem to be place for an education which sought to 'improve' individuals and their attitudes *as well as* one which encouraged them to transform society.

The radical emphasis on the importance of structural change is illustrated by their relative lack of interest in teacher training. The 1960s initiative SPERRT - the Society for the Promotion of Educational Reform through Teacher Training [80] - did not receive much radical support. Radicals did not consider that a new lot of teachers with fresh attitudes and approaches could make much impact, because what teachers ended up doing in schools was determined not by their individual consciousness but by the requirements, roles and constraints imposed on schools by the social structure.

Radicals were interested in structures in a rather more specfic sense. They pointed out that many of the wrongs of schools could be detected not in the curriculum, nor in methods and practices, but in the organisational structure of the school. I will be discussing this in chapter 4.

PRINCIPLE

As I shall be observing many times in later chapters, the radicals' firm commitment to their *principles* amounted to high moral rectitude. There was, for example, a dogged commitment to the doctrine that the end does not justify the means. This led them to decline the use of methods perceived as wrong in themselves, regardless of the desirable benefits they might produce. We have already seen an instance of this: the unwillingness of radical teachers to climb the school hierarchy (on the grounds that hierarchy is bad) even if, by doing so, they would have been in a better position to implement radical policies.

There was, too, an almost total refusal to compromise. Many radicals felt that if they could not win a battle outright, it was better to lose than reach a compromise settlement. This was frequently illustrated by the Rank & File teachers' group's approach to pay claims: anything less than a complete victory was condemned as a 'sell-out' by the union leadership.

This firmness of principle was not just a moral stance. It was a conscious attempt to prevent radical initiatives from suffering the fate of gradual degeneration. Noting how previous utopian experiments had been corrupted and distorted, radicals wanted the *process of change* to reflect the ideals of the society which they eventually hoped to create. The fear was that if compromise and expediency were adopted as tactics on the way to the ideal world, then that ideal world would itself be fatally compromised [81].

Many examples of this were provided by the free schools (see chapter 4) and I will be giving specific examples in my discussion of the experience of White Lion Street Free School in chapters 6 and 7.

At its best, the radicals' commitment to principle showed a commendable determination not to be diverted from objectives. At its worst, it became a devotion to 'purity' which denied that any virtue could be made out of necessity and degenerated into an impotent negativeness.

IDEALISM

> ... in taking thought for the education of the young it is impossible to be too idealistic, and... the more "commonsensical" and "utilitarian" one's philosophy of education, the shallower and falser it will prove to be.[82]

It may be said that the fundamental premise of the radical tradition is a belief in the perfectability of human society. What keeps radicals going is a vision of utopia. And indeed, much of the radical literature about education was concerned with how education could be in an ideal world.

This radical idealism (I use the word in the sense of a vision of how things ought to be, and not in the philosophical sense), when combined with the oppositionism and the firmness of principle which I have described, is sufficient to explain why radicals found it so hard to answer the question 'what do we do now?', even though *action* was what they wanted. Because what *could* be done in the immediate circumstances seemed so unsatisfactory (progress was miniscule, full of compromises, half-measures and 'tinkering') some radicals preferred to fantasise a catharsis of 'revolution', after which everything would come good all at once.

Few radicals believed that the changes they sought could be achieved by reasoned argument alone. This was because such argument can only succeed if there is a firm ground of shared assumptions, and where there is a unity of social interest; only in such circumstances would there be the possibility of appealing to consensus. Radicals criticised the progressive strategy exemplified by the journal *Forum*:

> The *Forum* attitude seems to be that if you present your case soundly any 'reasonable person' will agree with you.[83]

Radicals expected their case to be opposed by those with a vested interest in the status quo, and their strategy, therefore, was to appeal to those who did not have any such interest. Their analysis generally led them to believe that this was the working class, which is why so much of the radical literature concerns itself with the schooling of working class children. There were few signs, however, of a working class response to the clarion call.

Radicals did not expect that significant changes would be implemented by the powers-that-be. They perceived the powers-that-be (and in the late 1960s this included Labour government at local and national level) to be part of the problem and not a means to its solution. It would therefore be inaccurate to describe the organisations of the radical movement as 'pressure groups': in general they were not lobbying for reforms. To be sure, they did state their 'demands' - for instance the demands of the Schools Action Union (see pages 128 and 131) - but such demands were made not so much in expectation of any response but rather as a means of publicly exposing the obduracy of the establishment.

Thus, for example, there were few radical submissions to official committees of enquiry like the Taylor, James or Bullock committees [84]. By contrast, there had been a good number of progressive submissions to the Plowden committee. Instead, it was the tenet of radicals that change would only come through popular mass action - that is, by ordinary people taking action on a massive scale. The appeal, therefore, was to the hearts and minds of ordinary people.

This is why the accusations sometimes levelled against radicals - of secret conspiracy, of plans for subversion, of totalitarian aspirations [85] - were wide of the mark. Such methods were alien to the radical strategy. Several radical organisations freely published their membership lists, and almost all the radical journals printed the names of their editorial boards. No doubt there were individual radicals who harboured conspiratorial fantasies (of the Angry Brigade ilk) but they were in no way representative of the generality of radicals.

IRREFUTABILITY

A peculiar characteristic of radical ideas lies in their imperviousness to refutation, either by argument or appeal to the evidence. This lack of susceptibility to refutation places some radical arguments outside of the bounds of rational discourse as Karl Popper has defined it.

There are several components of this irrefutability. Firstly, much of the radical argumentation is *prescriptive*: it is couched in terms of what *ought to be*. For example, teacher-pupil relationships ought to be more informal, schools ought to be open to the community at all times, children ought to take to swimming like ducks to water. Whilst one can,

if one wishes, disagree that things ought to be like this, it is very hard to refute such prescriptions. (Counter arguments which point out the possible consequences if such-and-such were done are easily met by further prescriptions: thus, for example, the counter argument that greater informality between teachers and pupils might lead to a breakdown of good order in schools can be met by 'only temporarily, until teachers and pupils come to recognise each other as people'. And so on).

Secondly, the radical case is built upon a number of axioms which are articles of faith. The clearest example here is the belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature and the allied belief in the perfectability of human society.

Thirdly, much radical argumentation is based on uncertain or shifting premises, and so it is always open to radicals who are in danger of losing an argument to 'shift the goalposts' (this is related to challenging assumptions). One technique for doing this is the use of prescriptive definition, by which terms are defined so as to make the argumentation self-evident. Indicators of this technique are the qualifying of terms by 'real', 'true' or 'properly understood' - as in 'true learning is...' or 'real education means...', or 'socialism, properly understood, stands for...'. The radical literature is rife with such prescriptive definitions [86]. Briefly, the trouble with such definitions is that they make it possible to skirt around tricky questions of whether a statement is true or false. Supposing that I want to prove that my next-door neighbour doesn't love cats. All I have to do is assert (a) that *true* cat-lovers feed their cats only on Whiskas; and (b) that my neighbour gives her cat only Kit-e-Kat. The

deduction that my neighbour doesn't love cats is logical, but what we really need to ask is whether the first assertion is true.

Fourthly, radicals were often unwilling to accept the conventional rules of argument and conventional rules of what may be counted as evidence. There were, for example, those who regarded the laws of logic as an un-necessary imposition, and others who condemned any recourse to empirical evidence as 'positivism' or 'empiricism'.

Fifthly, it seems that many radical arguments were deployed not primarily to support (or refute) a proposition, but to win people over to the radical point of view. At times it appeared that the criterion of truth being employed was not the weight of evidence, nor the soundness of the reasoning, but the degree of response it could evoke from the audience being addressed. A commonly used technique here was to counter an argument by questioning the motives of the person putting that argument. Whilst it *is* legitimate to ask questions about people's motivation, that is not *all* that needs to be done to refute their arguments.

The truth criterion which seems to have been employed by many radical writers was that expressed by the American pragmatist William James: "The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief".[87] Without getting bogged down in philosophy, let us just note that this offers no way of resolving disagreements between competing belief systems. And since what radicals were trying to do was to propose a competing belief system, they offered their intended audience no means of deciding whether what they said was true or not. In other words, you believed what the radicals said if you wanted to. Most people, it seems, did not want to.

I do not want it to be thought that I am saying that only radicals make such mistakes. I do not think that the radical arguments are any worse in these respects than most other talk about education. I have written elsewhere about the inadequacies of the *Black Papers* [88], and I think it could easily be shown that 'middle-of-the-road' arguments fare no better under scrutiny.

What I do want to say is that it is not in the interests of the radical case to use faulty argumentation. And that is another theme of this book.

It will be noted that my discussion so far has not referred to the substantive content of the radical view of education. That will be the concern of later chapters, and Appendix A (page 461) sets out in brief form all the criticisms which radicals were making of schooling.

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE WERE RADICALS?

The majority of people involved in the radical movement in education were young: under, say, 30 years of age. But it would be wrong to think of the radical movement as a 'youth rebellion' or as an example of 'inter-generational' conflict (although there were elements of that), not only because radicalism has a long tradition, but also because there were plenty of older people involved. If the audiences in the packed halls were predominantly young, the speakers were usually from older generations - A.S.Neill, Robert Mackenzie or Michael Duane in England, John Holt and Paul Goodman in America. Most of the influential books were written by older people, and older people were conspicuously active in many of the organisations of the movement.

Radical activists had, typically, been through grammar school (or even public school) and higher education. There was irony, often pointed out at the time, in the fact that it was those who had 'done well' by the conventional system who were now attacking it.

The movement was very largely one of students and teachers, or people who had 'dropped out' from these roles but still maintained links with them. It was possible to find a number of professionals such as architects, journalists, academics, psychologists, therapists, or social workers, active in the movement, but not many. There was very little appreciable participation by parents qua parents. There were organisations of parents, notably the Confederation for the Advancement of State Education (CASE), the Parents' National Education Union (PNEU) and, later on, Education Otherwise. CASE was progressive, certainly, but hardly radical; PNEU, a long-standing organisation, had by this time become insignificant; and Education Otherwise was concerned solely with helping parents who wanted to educate their children at home.

Despite its advocacy of the cause of the working class, the radical movement was not a working class movement. Even those participants who had come from working class backgrounds were, by virtue of their grammar school and higher education, and their current occupational status, distanced from the class. The organisations of the Labour movement - trade unions, the Labour Party and the Communist Party (the only other left-wing party with an appreciable working class following) were not sympathetic to the radical movement [89].

Ethnically, the radical movement was almost exclusively white, and although there was a handful of Asian and Afro-Caribbean activists, it cut no ice with black people in general.

The dramatic rise of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s was perhaps the most successful and enduring radical development of the period. Yet its relationship with the radical education movement was not a strong one. Women were active in the radical organisations (numbers of men and women on the editorial boards of radical journals being in most cases roughly equal). But feminists had to fight their quarter within the radical movement just as much as outside of it, and it was not until the 1970s were well under way that distinct feminist perspectives made any impact on radical educational thought, or on the structure of groups or on publishing. Few of the radical books and pamphlets about education in this period were written by women: Leila Berg, Mog Ball and Linda Gilchrist (both co-authors with men), Nell Keddie (as an editor), Nan Berger, Alison Truefitt and Chanie Rosenberg were exceptional [90]. The fact that the history of progressive education is studded with distinguished women - Mary Wollstonecraft (who tore into Rousseau's sexism in *Vindication of the Rights of Women*), Maria Montessori, Dorothy Revell, Susan Isaacs, Ethel Mannin, Beatrice Ensor, Dora Russell, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Dorothy Gardner, Alice Woods, Rachel and Margaret MacMillan are examples - did not, for some reason, give women a 'head start' in radical education in the 1960s. By the end of the 1970s, of course, there was an established and growing feminist literature on education and this must now be considered to be at the core of radical analyses of education [91].

THE SIZE OF THE MOVEMENT

In numerical terms, the radical movement was not a mass movement. I know of no way of assessing accurately how many people were involved, but some figures give us an idea of the dimensions. By far the largest membership organisation was the National Union of School Students

(NUSS) which, in the mid-1970s, had a paper membership of 15,000. This was some 5 per cent of the secondary school population. It seems unlikely, however, that a majority of these were active members with any consciousness of being part of a radical movement. The next biggest membership organisation was the Rank & File teachers' group: its 1200 supporters (at its peak) formed about one-third of one percent of teachers in maintained schools. Of the radical journals, the NUSS's *Blot* achieved the largest circulation with a figure of 10,000. *Children's Rights* also claimed a circulation of 10,000, but this may have been an over-estimate. One issue of *Rank & File* journal achieved a circulation of 9,000 copies; if we assume that all of these were sold to teachers, this was over two per cent of teachers in maintained schools.

Another quantifiable indicator is the sales of radical books. Some publishers have been kind enough to provide me with figures, although not, unfortunately, Penguin, who certainly topped the lists with books like Leila Berg's *Risinghill: Death of A Comprehensive School*. Ivan Illich's *Dechooling Society* had, by 1985, sold a total of 81,000 copies in Britain, but more typical would be Chris Searle's *This New Season* which sold just under 3,000, or R.F.Mackenzie's *A Question of Living* which sold just over 3,000. A.S.Neill's *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* sold close to 6,000, Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist's *What School is For* 8,300 and Samuel Bowles' and Herbert Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America* over 13,000.

I do not think we can make very much of these figures, but taken together, they are not inconsistent with an estimate of the radical movement as involving between 10,000 and 20,000 people, excluding school students who were paper members of the NUSS. Whatever the

figures, it is certain that we are talking about a very small percentage of teachers and school students, and an even smaller percentage of the population as a whole.

In the next three chapters I will describe the groups and publications of the radical movement in more detail, and in doing so return to some of the themes which I have outlined in this chapter.

NOTES

1. Robin Barrow *Radical Education* page 1.

2. Raymond Williams *Keywords*.

3. "It is doubtful if RSSF would have had the term 'revolutionary' included in its name if it had been set up prior to May (1968)." Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation *The Political Theory of the Student Movement* page 27.

4. See, for example, Ralph Harris (ed) *Radical Reaction*.

5 The publications of these groups included *Radical Philosophy, History Workshop Journal, Red Rat* and *Humpty Dumpty* (both journals of radical psychologists), *Copeman* and *Heavy Daze* (both concerned with the interests of mental patients), *Issues in Radical Therapy, Red Scientist, Radical Science, Science for People, Cultural Studies, Needle* (radicals in the health service), *Arse* (radical architects), *Real Time* (radicals in computers), *Open Secret* (radical journalists), *Towards Socialist Child Care, Case-Con* (radical social workers), *Conference of Socialist Economists, Critique of Anthropology, Camerawork, Radical Statistics, ASS* (radical lawyers), *Radical*

Alternatives to Prison, *Shrew* and *Red Rag* (feminists), *Gay News*, *Black Voice*, *Race Today*.

6. Leslie Halliwell *Film Guide* page 1033.

7. George Melly *Revolt into Style* page 79/80.

8. The significance of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia perhaps needs explaining: it did for the 1960s generation what Hungary had done for the previous generation: convince them that Soviet socialism was not the kind of alternative they were looking for. It caused the 1960s generation to write books with titles like *Obsolete Communism: The Way Forward* (Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit).

9. Brian Simon *The Radical Tradition in Education in Britain*; W.A.C.Stewart *Progressives and Radicals in English Education 1750-1970*; W.A.C.Stewart and W.P.McCann *The Educational Innovators 1750-1880*; W.A.C.Stewart *The Educational Innovators*, Volume 2; Harold Silver *English Education and the Radicals 1780-1850*.

10. Simon Maccoby *The English Radical Tradition 1763-1914*; Christopher Hampton (ed) *A Radical Reader*.

11. See Fred Inglis *Radical Earnestness*.

12. Brian Simon *op cit*. Simon refers in his title to 'Britain' rather than England because he includes Robert Owen and his son Robert Dale Owen in the tradition; they were, of course, Welsh. I am persisting in talking about the *English* tradition, not out of disregard for Scotland or Wales, but out of respect for their independent traditions which I am not qualified to discuss. Nonetheless, I have taken liberties throughout this study: R.F.Mackenzie is Scottish, as was A.S.Neill; I mention both a good deal in this study.

13. Liam Hudson *The Cult of the Fact* page 92.

14. Douglas Holly *Society, Schools and Humanity* page 23.

15. This idea comes from Helvetius (*De L'Esprit* page 494/5) which reminds us that there is nothing peculiarly English about the ideas we are discussing here.

16. Raymond Williams *The Long Revolution*; Paul Goodman *Growing Up Absurd.*

17. For example, in the debate about whether particular religious groups should be allowed to set up separate schools.

18. See, for example, Richard Johnson 'Really Useful Knowledge' in *Radical Education* issues 7 and 8.

19. Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

20. See Ken Worpole 'The School and the Community' in Douglas Holly (ed) *Education or Domination.*

21. See Appendix B (A note on class), page 474.

22. E.P. Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class*; Brian Simon *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920*; Harold Silver *The Concept of Popular Education*; J.F.C. Harrison *Learning and Living 1790-1960.*

23. A.H. Halsey, Jean Floud and C. Arnold Anderson (eds) *Education, Economy and Society*; Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden *Education and the Working Class*; J.W.B. Douglas *Home and School.*

24. G.D.H. Cole 'Education and Politics: A Socialist View' in *Year Book of Education 1952* page 46.

25. Ken Jones *Beyond Progressive Education.*

26. See Ken Worpole 'The School and the Community' in Doug Holly *op cit* page 196; and Chris Searle *This New Season* page 8/9.

27. For example, some of the contributors to David Rubinstein and Colin Stoneman (eds) *Education for Democracy*; Douglas Holly *Society, Schools and Humanity* and *Beyond Curriculum.*

28. Michael P. Smith *The Libertarians and Education.*

29. Colin Ward 'A Modest Proposal for the Repeal of the Education Act', *Anarchy* 53, July 1965.

30. See Ian Wright 'And Now for A Bit of Theory' in *Libertarian Education* 21.

31. W. Boyd and W. Rawson *The Story of the New Education*; R. J. W. Selleck *The New Education 1870 -1914*; R. J. W. Selleck *English Primary Education and the Progressives 1914 - 1939*. Again, there is signifiance in the fact that these books were published in the 1960s.

32. To my knowledge, there has never even been a list of these schools published, so it may be worth listing them here, with their dates of foundation. This list, may, however, be incomplete: advertisements in *The New Era* throughout the 1920s and 1930s indicate that a number of other schools felt close enough to the progressive movement to advertise in that magazine.

The list is: Abbotsholme (1889); Bedales (1893); King Alfred's (1897); St. Christopher's (1915); The Garden School (1917); Summerhill (1921); Greater Felcourt School (?); The Malting House (1924); Frensham Heights (1925); Tiptree Hall (1926); Dartington Hall (1926); Beacon Hill (1927); Kingsmoor (1927); Forest School (1930); Priory Gate (?); Burgess Hill (1936); St. Mary's Town and Country School (1937); Wennington (1940); Monkton Wyld (1940): Kilquahanity (1940); Kirkdale (1965); Durdham Park (1971). To this list might be added four public schools which had certain progressive features: Leighton Park (1890); Bembridge (1919); Rendcomb College (1920) and Bryanston (1928). In some respects certain religious schools might also be included such as Friends School, Saffron Waldon (1702), the Steiner Schools and Brockwood Park Krishnamurti Educational Centre. Finally we ought to add progressive schools which specialised in 'problem' children such as Clayesmore (1896), The Little Commonwealth (1913), The Farmhouse School (1917), Finchden Manor (1930), Red Hill (1934), Barns School (1940) and Epping House (1958).

33. See Trevor Blewitt (ed) *The Modern Schools Handbook*; and H.A.T.Child (ed) *The Independent Progressive School*.

34. Findlay Johnson's Sompting Village School was immortalised in Edmond Holmes *What Is and What Might Be*; E.F.O'Neill's Prestolee Village School is described in Gerard Holmes *The Idiot Teacher*; Alex Bloom's St. George's In the East School, Cable Street, East London, has to my knowledge never been written up although it was a source of inspiration to many in the decade after 1945 - see W.A.C.Stewart *Progressives and Radicals* page 479 and *The Times* 24.9.55; Braehead is described by headteacher R.F.Mackenzie in *A Question of Living* and *Escape from the Classroom*; and Risinghill in Leila Berg *op cit*.

35. See Nigel Wright *Progress in Education* page 47, footnote 8.

36. Maurice Ash *Who Are the Progressives Now?* page ix.

37. W.A.C.Stewart *Progressives and Radicals* final chapter.

38. For example in Jonathan Kozol *Death At An Early Age*.

39. Martin Carnoy *Education As Cultural Imperialism*.

40. See John Rowan *Ordinary Ecstasy: Humanistic Psychology in Action*.

41. See especially Carl Rogers *On Becoming a Person* and *Freedom to Learn*.

42. See Paul Adams and others *Children's Rights*.

43. For example David Hargreaves *Interpersonal Relations and Education* chapter 6.

44. Jeff Nuttall *Bomb Culture*; George Melly *Revolt Into Style*; Frank Musgrove *Ecstasy and Holiness*; Theodore Roszak *The Making of a Counter Culture*; the literature is enormous. For a recent re-evaluation see Robert Hewison *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties*. An interesting collection of documents from the period may be found in Peter Stansill and David Zane Marowitz *Bamn: Outlaw Manifestos and Ephemera 1965 - 1970*.

45. Raphael Samuel 'Breaking Up is Very Hard to Do' in *The Guardian* 2.12.85.

46. For example Alan Watts *The Book on the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*; Carlos Castaneda *Tales of Power*. For an examination of the numerous points of contact between eastern mysticism and alternative education, see Vinoba Bhave 'Education or Manipulation' in *Resurgence* Vol.4 No.6 (1974) pages 11-18.

47. John Lawson and Harold Silver *A Social History of Education in England* page 234.

48. This mistake is made by Mike Smith *The Underground and Education*.

49. *Oz* 28, May 1970.

50. Jonathan Croall (ed) *All the Best, Neill: Letters from Summerhill* page 91.

51. See Paul Adams and others *op cit*.

52. I have not, in this study, made more than passing reference to films, but the role of film in changing and forming attitudes is clearly a major one. See, for example, Peter Biskind *Seeing is Believing*.

53. See especially Jules Henry *Culture Against Man* and *Essays on Education*.

54. For example, John Holt *How Children Fail* page 130.

55. Graham Murdock 'The Politics of Culture' in Douglas Holly (ed) *Education or Domination* page 99.

56. See Ken Jones *op cit*; and Ted Benton 'Education and Politics' in Douglas Holly (ed) *op cit*.

57. A.S. Neill *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* page 29.

58. For example, Douglas Holly *Beyond Curriculum* page 11; and Colin and Mog Ball *Education for a Change*.

59. David Gorbutt 'The New Sociology of Education' in *Education For Teaching* 89, Autumn 1972, pages 3-11.

60. M.F.D.Young (ed) *Knowledge and Control.*

61. Colin and Mog Ball *op cit* page 7.

62. Harry Ree 'The Lost Generation' in *Times Educational Supplement* 10.10.1980.

63. E.P.Thompson 'The Peculiarities of the English' in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* page 67.

64. This was the argument of Herbert Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man.*

65. John Holt *Freedom and Beyond* page 11.

66. Brian Simon *The Radical Tradition in Education in Britain* page 9. A similar perception was claimed for the American radicals - see Ronald and Beatrice Gross *Radical School Reform* page 17.

67. Michael P. Smith *The Libertarians and Education* page 16.

68. Big Flame *The Crisis in Education* page 11.

69. W.B.Curry in Trevor Blewitt (ed) *op cit* page 59.

70. *Ibid* page 57.

71. Brian Simon in David Rubinstein and Colin Stoneman (eds) *Education For Democracy* page 149.

72. Douglas Holly *Society, Schools and Humanity* page 10.

73. For some Marxists, the fact that progressivism gained Conservative support was proof that there must be something wrong with it. Thus it was argued (for example by Big Flame *op cit*) that progressivism was merely an attempt to update the education service so as to better meet the needs of modern capitalism.

74. Edmond Holmes *What Is and What Might Be.*

75. Robin Barrow *op cit* page 4.

76. Quoted in W.A.C.Stewart *Progressives and Radicals* page 35.

77. Quoted in *ibid* page 35.

78. Keith Paton *The Great Brain Robbery* page 28.

79. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels 'The Communist Manifesto' in Selected Works in One Volume page 53.

80. See Tyrell Burgess (ed) *Dear Lord James: A Critique of Teacher Training.*

81. This was the idea expressed by Ernst Zander in 'The Great Utopia' in *Contemporary Issues* Vol.2 No.5, Winter 1950.

82. Edmond Holmes *op cit* page 177.

83. Judy Palfreman in *Rank & File 7* page 22.

84. An exception was the submission made by School Without Walls to the Taylor Committee on the management and government of schools. See School Without Walls *Learning Pack.*

85. The specialist in such allegations was Tory MP John Stokes.

86. See for example John Holt *The Underachieving School* page 13. See also White Lion Street Free School's definition of learning quoted on page 368 below, and the quotation about 'real learning' on page 404.

87. William James *Essays in Radical Empiricism.*

88. Nigel Wright *Progress in Education.*

89. The position of the Communist Party of Great Britain during this period was interesting. CP policy on education was determined by a group of veteran communists - of whom Max Morris was the best known - who were implacably hostile to the radical movement: see their journal *Education Today and Tomorrow* throughout this period. Individual members of the CP - especially the younger ones - found this hard to accept and commonly left the CP if they wanted to be involved in the organisations of the radical education movement.

90. See bibliography for reference to their work.

91. See chapter 9, note 27, page 459.

CHAPTER 2

A SURVEY OF THE MOVEMENT - RADICAL TEACHERS

In this and the next two chapters I will survey the groups which made up the radical movement. This chapter is concerned with radical teachers; the next with the school students' movement and various other groups; and chapter 4 with free schools. As well as giving factual details about each group, I will be discussing their ideas and strategies and exploring some themes which will be examined in detail in later chapters. Of the teachers' groups I have chosen to give particular attention to *Libertarian Teacher* because it was the first in the field and (in its later forms as *Libertarian Education* and *Lib Ed*) the longest running; and to the Rank & File group because it was the largest group.

LIBERTARIAN TEACHER

Through the 1960s anarchist comment on questions of education was presented in articles in the monthly *Anarchy* and the weekly *Freedom* [1]. In 1966 two school teachers, Peter Ford and Alex Taylor, announced in *Freedom* the formation of a Libertarian Teachers Association (LTA). Peter Ford recollects:

> I had clear ideas about my own particular predicament and experience... the motivation to form an association came out of the predicament. Working in an institution in which I felt uncomfortable and critical, I extrapolated from my experience to think that there must be quite a lot of people feeling this way too. It was not tied to a theory about how things ought to be. But from an association, a linking up of those people, something might come - if no more than some sort of solidarity between them. The initial idea I had was an association of individuals - teachers or students - who were by their own assessment libertarians or anarchists, and it would be a kind of mutual aid association.[2]

To start with, the LTA simply circulated the names and addresses of kindred spirits. This was what the first issue of what was to develop into the *Libertarian Teacher* journal consisted of. LTA had no officials, no formal membership, and no subscription rate: "If you want to consider yourself to be a member of LTA then so you are!"[3]

The LTA held several day conferences, attended by 20 or 30 people, to discuss educational questions [4]. These led to a statement of *Principles, Aims and Objectives* published in 1968; it is reproduced as an Appendix to this chapter.

The deliberate structurelessness of the LTA arose not only from that particular variety of anarchism which is suspicious of all forms of organisation (on the grounds that they inevitably lead to concentrations of power); it was a more general feature of the counter culture at that time, both in Britain and America [5]. It is doubtful whether LTA would ever have become more than a small mailing list which gave rise to small meetings (which was the fate of four similar ventures - the Anarchist-Syndicalist Alliance Teachers' Network in the early 1970s, the Libertarian Education News Service in 1973; the Blackburn based Schools Anarchy Propagation Action Group in 1973; and the Wolverhampton based Libertarian Education network - "we do not want libertarian schools or libertarian teachers; we are anti-school and anti-teacher" - in 1974) if it had not been for the success of *Libertarian Teacher* [6]. The second issue was published in August 1966, a 16-page duplicated pamphlet which exchanged information between members. 230 copies were distributed. The third issue (July 1967) listed members, noted some schools of interest and reported on developments around the world. The main function was still as a notice-board. *Libertarian Teacher* was soon selling 1000 copies. In Peter

Ford's words "there was a response and quite a vigorous one. We were surprised. There was a lot of reaction to a little spark." There were, it seemed, other people who shared Ford's predicament.

Although each issue contained one or two theoretical articles, such as Carl Rogers' 'Personal Thoughts on Teaching and Learning' in the third issue, and Colin Blundell's 'Notes Towards a Libertarian Philosophy of Education' in the fifth, the early issues consisted mainly of short pieces of interesting information. By the fifth issue the journal was able to report on the 1968 events in the French Lycees and on the Free Schools Campaign in Britain (see the next chapter). *Libertarian Teacher* had prefigured these events by two years, and this marks it out from the other groups and publications which arose in response to public events. As Peter Ford emphasises, it did not originate in a desire to proselytize any great ideas or theory, but in a sense of discomfort and a wish to get together with others who shared this discomfort. Michael Smith has drawn a distinction between 'spontaneous libertarianism' "whose proponents arrive at it independently and without knowledge of those who have held the position before" and the libertarian tradition which is well documented [7]. *Libertarian Teacher* was an expression of spontaneous libertarianism: there is no acknowledgement of the tradition until the ninth issue, six years after it was founded. Instead the influences were contemporary - Paul Goodman, John Holt, R.F.Mackenzie, Michael Duane, Jean-Paul Sartre, A.S.Neill, W.David Wills, Colin Ward and Anthony Weaver.

From the sixth issue of the journal (1970) editorial control began to be transferred to an anarchist group centred on Leicester's Black Flag bookshop, and by the ninth issue (1972) this change-over was complete. The change was marked by a new format, style and outlook, and with the

tenth issue a new name - *Libertarian Education*. By this time the LTA had faded away - having had a 'membership' of 300 in 1969; from then on all the energy was put into producing the journal.

These changes were significant. In its early years *Libertarian Teacher* was produced by - and for - teachers who had a measure of confidence that they could do a worthwhile job in state schools. This had been the general tenor of articles in *Anarchy* and *Freedom* earlier in the decade: in fact, no clear distinction was drawn at that stage between libertarianism and progressivism. *Libertarian Teacher* owed more perhaps to the drawing room strictures of Herbert Read than the revolutionaries who had fought against Tsarism in Russia. In general the targets - the things libertarians felt uncomfortable about in schools - were those of progressives: authoritarian teachers, corporal punishment, uniforms, streaming, the contempt which some teachers felt for the children. The 'schools of interest' listed in the early issue of the journal were, in the main, progressive schools. (The headmaster of one such wrote angrily to deny any association with libertarianism).

After the ninth issue the new editors took a different stance. They had assimilated the outlook of the 1960s counter-culture; they were sceptical of the possibilities of libertarians doing a 'straight' job like teaching. They did not patiently await gradual reforms in schools, but wanted to turn schools upside down. They were in the business of changing the world, not easing their own discomfort.

The difference between these two types of libertarianism - the one patient and wordly-wise, the other impetuous and aggressive - has been nicely captured by Peter Woods in his portrait of two teachers, 'Tom' and 'Dick' [8]. Drawing on Hammersley's categories [9] he describes

Tom's orientation as 'pragmatic' and Dick's as 'paradigmatic'. The one largely accepts the constraints of the traditional school and explores the possibilities of bringing about small changes by stealth; the other, spurred on by a vision of how enormously different things ought to be, attacks the constraints head-on and constantly exploits opportunities to disrupt the system.

Consistent with the switch from Tom's outlook to Dick's, the title of the journal was changed from *Libertarian Teacher* to *Libertarian Education*, a change not explicitly explained in the journal apart from the comment that "the term 'libertarian teacher' is a contradiction in terms/pretentious/exclusive". The change reflects libertarian doubts about teaching which I will discuss further in chapter 8 (page 375 ff). Margaret Mead had voiced these doubts in 1942:

> There are several striking differences between our concept of education today and that of any contemporary primitive society; but perhaps the most important one is the shift from the need for an individual to learn something which everyone agrees he would wish to know, to the will of some individual to teach something which it is not agreed that anyone has any desire to know.[10]

Curiously, one of *Libertarian Teacher*'s mentors - John Holt - was travelling in the opposite direction at this time, eschewing the word 'education' because it had been appropriated by the 'professional schoolmen', but insisting that the word 'teacher' must be retained because it refers to an ancient and honourable function [11].

The changed title signified not only a rejection of the teacher's role, but also an appreciation that education goes on everywhere all the time: in other words the editors wished to emphasise the place of informal education as against formal schooling.

The first eight issues of the journal were produced on a stencil duplicator. From the ninth issue it was printed by off-set litho. The significance of the 'litho revolution' at this time has been much discussed. It provided the editors with a much greater scope for expression, both in lay-out and the use of graphics. The imaginitive use of litho printing was one of the striking achievements of the 1960s 'underground press', and although the editors of *Libertarian Education* did not have the time, skill or resources (especially for photography and colour printing) to emulate *Oz* or *IT*, litho printing allowed them to match form with content in a way in which stencil duplicating does not permit.

In common with other radical education publications (with the exception of *Teaching London Kids*) the graphic art of *Libertarian Education* was not of a high standard. It tended to rely heavily on cartoons stolen from *The Beano*. *The Beano*'s characters - Dennis the Menace, Beryl the Peril and the Bash Street Kids - were (and still are) anarchistic in the tradition of the Good Soldier Schweik. The fun and games at Bash Street School, where the kids always get the last laugh and the teacher is a buffoon (but not entirely unrecognisable to teachers), were fruitful sources of inspiration for *Libertarian Education*. Dennis the Menace symbolised working class rebellion against the pampered elite of Greyfriars.

From 1972 *Libertarian Education* came out fairly regularly - two or three times a year - and sold about 1,500 copies per issue. It needs to be remembered that all the radical journals we shall be discussing were produced by volunteers who had many other pressures on their time, and with negligible financial resources. A new issue could not be published until sales of the previous issue had paid the outstanding printer's

bill. Significant donations of cash, from any source, were almost unknown. Until the Publications Distribution Cooperative was established in the mid-1970s, radical journals had no organised means of distribution and relied for sales on the individual efforts of supporters and requests for copies from people who had heard of it by word of mouth. A small number of radical bookshops could be relied upon to place firm orders, but like so many other radical organisations, these tended to disappear overnight leaving unapid debts. Against this background a sales figure of 1,500 was an appreciable achievement.

Libertarian Education entered a third phase from issue 21 (1977). There was a steady improvement in the format, production settled at a regular two issues per year, and the articles became rather more serious, with a growing acknowledgement of the historical tradition to which the journal belonged. The editors warmed to de-schooling (whose chief protagonist Ivan Illich was by this time gaining a certain respectability) but didn't jump on that bandwagon: in Michael Smith's judgement:

> Illich's naivety about power marks him off from the anarchist movement. Anarchist analysis starts from the fact of power, and Illich's inability to imagine society in terms of power puts him on the fringe of serious anarchist thought.[12]

In this third phase the journal returned to some extent to the outlook of the first phase - dwelling on the preoccupations of libertarians who wanted to work in state schools, especially curriculum issues. With issue 25 the name changed again - to *Lib Ed* - on the grounds that *'Libertarian Education'* was dull and cumbersome. *Lib Ed* ceased publication with issue 30 (in 1981), but it was ressurrected in 1986 when *Lib Ed* (Second Series) was launched.

Any evaluation of a journal like *Libertarian Education* must begin with recognition of the sheer physical difficulty of producing it. Scarcely an issue passed without appeals from the editorial group for more money, more subscribers, more people to help with the tasks of production and distribution. Such appeals went, apparently, largely unheeded, but the journal kept on being produced. It was one of the few radical education magazines to be produced outside the London area (the others were the Scottish *This Magazine is About Schools*, the Brighton-based *Educat*, the Manchester-based *Women and Education*, Exeter's *Pied Paper* and a number of school students' magazines) and this had a bearing on the difficulty it had in finding helpers.

The journal played a significant role in the radical movement in six respects. First, it provided the first model of what a radical education magazine might look like. Second, it disseminated and popularised radical ideas - such as those of Holt, Goodman and Illich. Third, it generated a sense of there being a *movement*:

> Please let us start using *Libertarian Teacher* and each other's ideas and experience in such a way that each of us can feel that whatever we do that is radical is part of a *movement* for change in our schools, and that whether we 'succeed' or 'fail' the learning we gain is valuable.[13]

Fourth, it was a forum for the *cris-de-coeur* of young teachers who were distressed by the grim encounters of the classroom. Fifthly, it was an information exchange which noted that other groups existed and described what they were doing, and reviewed books. And finally, it provided a sense of solidarity for libertarians - that feeling of not being alone which is essential for the social confidence, if not the mental health, of radicals:

> ...many comrades gain strength from the knowledge that specific problems/difficulties are part of our common experience and are not necessarily caused by personal inadequacies as the school authorities try to convince us...[14]

With the benefit of hindsight, a major weakness of the journal was its failure to develop its ideas over the fourteen years of its life. Unfortunately the new series which started in 1986 seems to continue this weakness. As the editorial in issue 10 (1973) noted: "we have been appallingly backward in presenting and developing any real analysis of our attitudes." After a dozen issues the journal ran out of anything new to say, and it read as if it was aimed at the person who had just discovered it for the first time. Determined not to be academic (a review of my own book *Progress in Education* in issue 24 was entitled simply 'Yawn') it also spurned the theoretical; but this is not to say that it advocated any practical strategy. Its account of schooling remained at the level of complaining about iniquities, and yet the libertarian tradition has provided potentially fruitful tools for offering an explanation that these specific phenomena are not mere accidents but can be seen as features consistent with the part schools are playing in society as a whole.

In their effort to be lively the editors invested the journal with an aura of frivolity (such as the *Beano* graphics) which, in the end, itself became boring. There was an element of recklessness in some of the causes the editors chose to espouse. Issues 16, 17 and 18 were much concerned with the case of a Nottinghamshire teacher, Manuel Moreno, who was twice dismissed from school teaching posts. Moreno, who liked to regale his classes with explicit descriptions of his own adolescent sexual exploits, was perhaps not the kind of champion the older libertarian tradition would have chosen. It was left to an irate correspondent [15] to wonder aloud whether any parent would want their child to be compulsorily 'educated' by Moreno.

Questions of sexuality were frequently discussed in the journal in its second and third stages. There were 13 articles on childhood sexuality, paedophilia and homosexuality in 20 issues [16]. In contrast, there were only five articles about free schools - yet free schools were something the journal could valuably have documented, analysed and supported. There was, in general, a lack of coverage of matters which were 'in the news' at the time, and a consequent failure to offer a libertarian analysis of the issues of the day. For example, the journal did not respond to the deschooling debate until 1974, more than four years after Illich had launched the concept. And it carried no reference to the death in 1973 of A.S.Neill.

This is not to say that the journal did not, over the years, carry some fascinating articles. Taken as a whole, the journals stand as a valuable, if uneven, representation of radical ideas about education in this period. What comes through is sustained anguish about difficult questions: can an anarchist work in a state school? what is the role of a libertarian teacher? how can schools be reformed? should libertarians endorse deschooling? It is a shame that the journal did not develop an analysis to provide libertarian answers to these questions. No-one else was going to do it.[17]

RANK & FILE

Rank & File was formed early in 1968 by a number of teachers who were members of, or close to, the International Socialism group (IS) [18]. Whilst *Libertarian Education* was avowedly anarchist, Rank & File was - not avowedly - Trotskyist, and this accounts for the marked differences between the two. The small group who started Rank & File were not

typical of the radical movement in one respect at least: most of them were not young. In their forties or fifties, they were veteran Trotskyists or emigrees from the Communist Party. And yet they successfully appealed to young radical teachers in a way that no other group did. The founders of Rank & File started with the advantage of a great deal of political and organisational experience, and the group had a tight structure which was not matched by any other group in education.

The first issue of the group's journal *Rank & File Teacher* set out its aim:

> Rank & File is produced by left-wing teachers within the NUT, who believe that the Union could, and should, be the most important and effective factor in forcing change and progress, not only in the general sociological-educational field, but also - and most especially - in the struggle for better salaries and conditions for all teachers.[19]

The political strategy of IS was to intervene in the struggles of the labour movement in order to develop a revolutionary political consciousness amongst the working class. The primary intention of Rank & File therefore was to address teachers as workers and trade unionists, and thus develop trade union militancy in the teaching profession. This was, in fact, not difficult to do in 1968: teachers were feeling badly-done-by and within a year the NUT, sharply nudged by Rank & File, launched an 'Interim Award' campaign. Teachers all over the country came out on strike in the biggest action in the union's history [20].

It is not within the scope of this study to discuss issues of teacher trade unionism, nor Trotskyist political strategy. My concern is rather with Rank & File's part in the radical education movement. As we have seen, the founders were interested in 'general sociological-

educational' change and progress, but this was for them secondary to trade union issues. At the time of founding the group they did not envisage going far beyond the progressivism represented by *Forum* journal, and in common with the Communist Party they saw the NUT as an appropriate vehicle for this progressivism. But the young teachers who were attracted to Rank & File had other ideas:

> OK so we need to be militant, that I fully endorse... Why? To raise the standard of living of the already middle class teacher to a higher strata? What socialist ideas are these? What about the working class children in school, already alienated by the predominance of middle class teachers and middle class standards and authoritarian heads... Why aren't the conditions of the children, the oppressed majority, our priority? Surely the top priority is not wages but to democratise the system - the running of the schools, limiting the head's power - these are true socialist ideals.[21]

and

> There is a contradiction in the teacher's position, since although he is engaged by the state machine to brainwash and mind children while their parents are at work, it is by education also that capitalism produces its own gravediggers. Education is needed for the efficient running of capitalist industry but man also demands from education some answers to the problems that beset him. Hence the student revolt.[22]

These young radicals found it hard to view the NUT as a force for educational progress. Of its nature the NUT had to take the public stance that teachers and schools were doing a fine job: how else could it justify pay claims? There could be no place within the NUT for the virulent attacks on teaching and schooling which radicals were by now voicing.

There was thus built into Rank & File a tension between trade unionism on the one hand and educational radicalism on the other. It was a tension which was never resolved. Trade union militancy required that teachers should unite together in the common interest of winning better pay and conditions. But radical educational ideas tended to *divide* teachers rather than unite them. The most militant teachers (in trade union terms) were to be found in the National Association of

Schoolmasters (NAS); and yet on educational questions the NAS was much less progressive than the NUT.

Rank & File was originally conceived as a quarterly journal, but within six months it was decided to make it into a membership organisation, and a 'Supporters' Group' was established in September 1968. (In the same way as the Militant Tendency has 'supporters' rather than 'members', in order to stay within Labour Party rules, so Rank & File avoided breaking NUT rules by enrolling people as 'supporters' of the journal). Rank & File was one of the few radical groups to have a journal *and* an active membership organisation. It was an effective structure and it may seem surprising that other groups did not imitate it. Furthermore, Rank & File was unique in having the backing of two significant political groupings: IS and the International Marxist Group (IMG). (IS was the dominant partner and was always able to determine Rank & File's direction). This backing was to prove invaluable, not least in providing a ready-made distribution network for the journal and a steady stream of highly committed recruits to the Supporters' Group. But it was also the source of dissension which wracked Rank & File from time to time.

Rank & File built a sophisticated organisational structure which served its purposes well. There were annual policy-making conferences, a National Committee, an Executive Committee, an Editorial Board for the journal, and active local groups in many areas (by 1973 there were some 40 of these in England and Wales). As well as the journal, the Executive Committee published a regular *Internal Bulletin*, for supporters only, which carried internal debates and communicated to local groups the tactical decisions taken by the Executive Committee. Although it would perhaps be too much to call Rank & File a 'well-oiled

machine', its organisational efficiency was unrivalled in the radical movement. Financially the group, depending on sales of the journal and occasional pamphlets, the subscriptions of supporters and collections at meetings, kept its head above water, helped by concessionary rates from the IS print-works. There was no need for 'Moscow gold' - not that Moscow had any sympathy for Trotskyists [23].

As in other radical groups, there was a tendency for activists to take on an immense work-load. In its peak years Rank & File had an apparatus of 30 to 40 local group convenors, 12 Executive Committee members, ten editorial board members, a business manager, a circulation manager and two national organisers, most of whom were putting in perhaps ten or fifteen hours a week on Rank & File work. This was on top of doing their work as teachers (and in my experience these people were, by-and-large, conscientious people who took their teaching work seriously), union activity and political commitments. For many the pace of life was frantic, placing a heavy stress on family and personal relationships. There was an intense *emotional* involvement in the work of Rank & File; whilst this helped to get the work done, the intense emotions tended to fire the internecine disputes which periodically broke out.

Rank & File journal was published regularly, five times a year, and sold on average about 4,000 copies per issue. By 1973 the number of supporters reached 1,200. The first 19 issues (until Spring 1972) reflected the primary concern with trade union issues, but there were regular articles advocating educational progressivism - against caning and religious instruction, for mixed-ability classes and comprehensive schools, against bias in text books, for the extension of nursery schooling and the raising of the school-leaving age. These articles

related such educational issues to wider questions of class and the political structure of society. A regular feature was the 'Casebook', which described the cases of teachers who had got the sack - often because they had come into conflict with their headteacher. These cases were viewed as trade union matters, and 'Casebook' usually demonstrated the reluctance of the NUT to support a member who had come into conflict with a headteacher.

Rank & File consistently supported school students' organisations like the Schools Action Union, and this marked it out from mainstream progressives. There were regular articles, too, pointing to racist practice in schools. But with a few exceptions [24] any distinctly *radical* criticism of schooling was confined, in the first four years, to the letters column and the book reviews section. The major exception was the stand Rank & File took on democracy in schools.

In the fifth issue (April 1969) the group printed 'A Teachers' Charter' which was subsequently reprinted as a pamphlet. The central proposal of this charter was

> ...a shift of power from the minority, authoritarian position of the head and education authorities, to the full participation by the parents, staff, students and the community at large, in all decisions taken in an educational context.[25]

(Rank & File was not the first to make this proposal: the same thing had been proposed a year earlier by the Libertarian Teachers Association [26].)

The ideas of *A Teachers' Charter* were extended and amplified in a longer pamphlet *Democracy in Schools* published in 1971. Originally Rank & File had conceived democracy in schools in terms of *workers' control*: at that time the annual conferences of the Institue for Workers'

Control were major gatherings of the radical left, and workers control was very much on the agenda of the Labour movement. But the democracy in schools policy had deeper educational implications, as the final words of *Democracy in Schools* hinted:

> ...the extension of democracy can release into education, in a great flood, the huge potential of ideas, abilities and energies that are now wasted in frustration, bitterness and cynicism.[27]

There was a debate within the Rank & File group about how far the democratic control of schools should be extended to school students [28]; it was, in fact, a debate which brought out a fundamental division of opinion within the group; I shall turn to this very shortly.

Rank & File's strategy was to raise the issue of school democracy in the NUT. It was successful in doing this, and the 1971 conference of the union set up a working party on 'teacher participation'. But eventually Rank & File was out-manouevred within the union and the democracy in schools campaign was defeated at the 1972 union conference. Three years later Rank & File did a U-turn and decided that it too was against democracy in schools because this would require teachers, as workers, to collaborate with capitalism. (This was an example of the oppositionism I referred to in chapter 1. The fear was that if schools were democratically controlled, then teachers would inevitably be drawn into implementing national and local government policies. Rank & File, after its U-turn, preferred the idea of classroom teachers being excluded from positions of control so that there would be no constraints on their attacks on those who were in control.)

The division of opinion to which I referred was between what I will term the 'quantitists' on the one hand and the 'qualitists' on the

other. Quantitists advocated 'more of the same': they held that educational problems could, by-and-large, be attributed to a shortage of resources - too few teachers, too large classes, inadequate buildings and equipment, insufficient books and materials, and limitations on access: the system was just not providing the means for working class children to get the decent education which middle class children received. Quantitists supported organisational changes - such as comprehensive schooling and mixed-ability teaching - which opened up opportunities for working class children. The quantitist view fitted in well with the progressive role envisioned for the NUT: public campaigns for extra resources and so forth. The quantitists' criticism of the NUT was that its campaigning was insufficiently militant.

'Qualitists' on the other hand subscribed to the wholesale critique of schooling set out in Appendix A. Whilst they would welcome additional resourcing, they did not believe that this would in itself bring about the changes they desired. For them 'education' was profoundly problematic - they wanted a wholesale review of what it was for and how it should be done. I will be discussing the differences between quantitists and qualitists further in chapter 5.

The debate within Rank & File had turned on this question: 'how do we attract young teachers to Rank & File?'. Quantitists believed that they would be attracted to Rank & File by trade union militancy: what bothered young teachers most was their poor pay and conditions. Qualitists believed that they would be attracted by educational radicalism: what bothered young teachers were the frustrations of the classroom. In 1972 the qualitists who, like the writer of the letter quoted above (page 83), wanted to talk about children and education rather than salaries and resources gained a temporary ascendancy in

Rank & File. The group organised a series of national education conferences which brought together many radical teachers for intense discussions of educational issues. Subsequently Rank & File groups around the country found that they could attract surprisingly large audiences of young teachers to hear speakers like Michael Duane and Chris Searle and discuss radical ideas about education. A measure of Rank & File's influence in this period was that its supporters successfully moved a series of radical resolutions at the 1972 Young Teachers Conference of the NUT, suggesting that Rank & File possibly represented the views of a majority of young teachers active in the union at that time. The national executive of the union moved quickly and abolished the Young Teachers Conference.

The issues of the journal numbered 20 to 25 (1972-73) reflected this new mood of educational radicalism. The 21st issue marked a merger with *Blackbored* (see page 93) and carried articles on the Schools Action Union, the National Union of School Students, a transcript of an English lesson in a secondary modern school, a discussion of the language and class question, an article which attempted to relate the 'struggle in the union' to the radical movement in education, a discussion of violence in schools, and an analysis of the relationship between the state and schooling. This issue was quite different in content - and in graphic design - from earlier issues, reflecting the *Blackbored* input, and it sold 9,000 copies, a figure rarely approached by any radical education publication before or since. It proved to be the high point for Rank & File.

In 1973 there was a change of policy within IS, and Rank & File stopped producing its journal. (The journal was resurrected later in the decade and continued publication into the 1980s; its stance was

pure quantitism). It produced instead an 'agitational paper' the purpose of which was to mobilise trade union militancy [29]. Although the new paper carried occasional articles on educational matters, its prioritising of trade union issues and explicitly propagandist tone were incompatible with the exploratory, tentative character of the educational articles which had been published in issues 20 to 25. A political schism between the IS group and the IMG led to an increasingly tight control of Rank & File by its IS leadership. Although it continued to be an influence in the NUT, Rank & File's contribution to the radical education movement dwindled. Ultimately in 1977 the IMG and other Rank & File supporters who were not members of IS combined to launch a new group - the Socialist Teachers' Alliance- and a new journal, *Socialist Teacher*.

The contribution which Rank & File made to the radical education movement is not to be found in the pages of its journal (apart from issues 20 to 25). The politics of Rank & File's leadership conceived of the group as taking a 'vanguard' role:

> ...we also seek to lead teachers - lead them towards what we argue as being the only perspectives which can ensure that the rank and file achieves, and defines, its own best interests, and those of the working class as a whole.[30]

Leadership was understood to mean developing policies and then winning the support of the NUT membership for these [31]. It was always necessary to have a 'line' - the 'correct perspective'; matters on which it was difficult to determine a firm line - matters which needed open-ended exploration - were pushed aside. There was no place within Rank & File for the kind of 'thinking aloud' which characterised the radical educationists.

A further difficulty arose from the strategy of working inside the NUT. In order to have a policy adopted by the NUT, whether at local or national level, it had to be framed in terms of a resolution which could be proposed at a meeting or conference. (Rank & File's obsession with framing resolutions earned the tag 'resolutionary socialism'). But the ideas of radical education could not easily be squeezed into the form of a resolution, and the way of advancing the cause within the union seemed therefore to be blocked.

Rank & File was therefore left with a 'line' on education which was derived from the simplistic 'base and superstructure' model [32] which, although it supported the cause of progressivism, was not able to incorporate much of the radical critique which had been developing since Rank & File started. That socialists needed to attend to this critique had been urged by Ken Worpole writing in *Rank & File* 14:

> There has been little co-ordinated work done in this country towards a socialist analysis of the education system... unless we get together to produce an overall critical theory of the system then the situation will remain, as now, one of isolated activity easily crushed, disillusionment amongst individual radicals in education and a general sense of powerlessness.[33]

However, Rank & File was not able to rise to this challenge, and it was left to *Hard Cheese* and *Radical Education* to take up the task of building a coherent socialist theory of education. This was a definite loss because at one time Rank & File had the attention of a large number of radical teachers and was in a position to promote a fruitful debate. There was a degree of 'auto-destruct' - characteristic of left-wing sects - in the way that it cut short this debate with the 1973 switch to the agitational paper.

Rank & File's importance lay in the fact that it was a focus for the concerns of young radical teachers. This, as I say, was not reflected

in the journal but in the local group meetings where embattled individuals gathered and gave each other a sense of solidarity and common purpose. The three national education conferences which Rank & File organised gave further encouragement to radicals, because of the large attendances (about 400 people) and the fervour with which ideas were exchanged.

It is not possible to evaluate the trade union side of Rank & File's efforts without going into matters which are outside the scope of this study. I will simply pose a question: is it adequate to analyse education in terms of a classical class struggle between workers (teachers) and bosses (Local Education Authorities)? Like any other employees, teachers need to defend their salaries and working conditions, but whether this should be the primary focus of attention of socialists who are concerned with education is questionable. This is a matter I will touch upon again in chapter 5.

MILITANT TEACHER

For the sake of completeness, and because the Militant Tendency has been so much in the news in the 1980s (Liverpool City Council and all that), it should be recorded that in the late 1960s and early 1970s the Militant Tendency produced a paper called *Militant Teacher* and organised a Militant Teachers Group. For a short period members of this group participated in Rank & File but were driven out by IS and IMG. The group showed even less interest in educational questions than Rank & File and gained little support. Militant supporters were also active in the Schools Action Union in its early stages but were eventually repelled from that organisation as well.

BLACKBORED

Blackbored was a litho-printed magazine of which four issues were published in 1970 and 1971. Produced by a group of school teachers, College of Education lecturers and students, it was primarily aimed at College of Education students but it proved to be popular with young teachers because of its refreshing treatment of their problems. *Blackbored*'s main concern was with the undemocratic nature of teacher training courses, but it took a lively and radical stance on questions of schooling. Attractively written and interesting (if messy) to look at, it sold about 3,000 copies of each of its four issues and caught the mood of a significant element in Colleges of Education at that time. It avoided the 'workerist' jargon which perhaps made *Rank & File* unattractive to new readers: its success lay in its approachability, in the impression it gave to students and young teachers that it was written by people like them.

By 1972 *Blackbored* was finding it hard to get people to do the work of producing and distributing the magazine: students who had finished their courses left and were not replaced. The editors of *Blackbored* approached the Rank & File group and proposed a merger of the two journals. The outcome was the joint issue of *Blackbored* 5 and *Rank and File* 21 published in September 1972. It was the only issue in which the *Blackbored* identity and style were retained. Subsequently *Blackbored* disappeared inside Rank & File.

Two of *Blackbored*'s founders, Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist, went on to publish a book in 1974 - *What School Is For* - which took up and developed some of the themes which had been raised in the magazine. I shall be referring to this book in later chapters. Selling over 8,000

copies, it was considerably more successful than most other radical books on education, suggesting that *Blackbored* had begun to mine a rich vein which, however, remained undeveloped.

We can mention at this point another short-lived magazine which was produced by students teachers - ***Pied Paper***, of which several issues were published in Exeter in 1975 and 1976. It was concerned particularly to build up a dialogue with other student teachers around the country. The pressures on student teachers, and the fact that they move off when their courses end, made the production of such a magazine difficult to sustain.

TEACHING LONDON KIDS

In the Autumn of 1972 the London branch of the National Association of Teachers of English held a series of conferences entitled 'Teaching London Kids'. The mood was one of radical optimism amongst English teachers that new possibilities were opening up for them in schools. A new magazine, *Teaching London Kids* (*TLK*), was launched to develop the ideas raised at the conferences. It stated its policy objectives in this way:

> Teaching London Kids is concerned with exploring among other things:
> - the practice and dilemmas of progressive/socialist teachers in state schools, especially as experienced by new teachers;
> - notions of 'progressive' teaching methods and their impact on the education of working class children;
> - the concentration of educational problems in London schools;
> - the ways in which the power structure of society affects the organisation and curriculum of schools;
> - the potential role of the school in the community and vice-versa;
> - the critical importance of language in teaching and learning;
> - above all, *Teaching London Kids* is concerned with presenting positive strategies for action.

This was a fair description of what the magazine attempted to do in the following years, and it had the advantage over other radical journals of having clearly defined aims, tied concretely to the reality of practice. Its concern was to address the real problems of the classroom in a way which could be of value to teachers in the here and now.

This approach was predicated on the belief that it was possible to be a radical teacher in state schools, a belief which was explained by Gerald Grace in a later issue of *TLK*:

> ... in the crisis period in inner-city schools in the early 1970s, given a serious shortage of teachers in those schools, the possibility for such schools to keep smooth, impersonal, institutional, functioning became fractured... in those schools, crucial spaces opened up that are not normally permitted to open up. These spaces were available for both teachers and pupils to exploit. Enterprising teachers used these spaces to press all sorts of radical questions.[34]

TLK's determination to be practical was a sign of the times. The heady days of the 1960s had gone and radicals had realised that 'the revolution' wasn't going to happen just yet. The Conservative party was back in power and Margaret Thatcher was Secretary of State for Education. *TLK*'s new realism was a decisive break with those radicals "frozen into a posture of non-involvement with the system for fear of inadvertantly helping to prop it up" [35].

As teachers of English, the founders of *TLK* owed something to the tradition of Leavis and Thompson (*Culture and the Environment*) and David Holbrook (*English for the Rejected*), but there was also a contemporary influence emanating from the English Department of the London Institute of Education, where innovative work was being done on several fronts [36]. *TLK*'s emphasis on *city* schooling was particularly significant, representing a break with earlier traditions in the same

way that free schools broke with the independent progressive tradition in rejecting ruralism. There was an important, and explicit, presumption that the education of inner-city children was a qualitatively different matter from the education of suburban and rural children [37]. But the reference to 'London' in *TLK*'s name probably hindered teachers in other cities from appreciating *TLK*'s relevance to them.

TLK never quite managed to avoid giving the impression that it was written by English teachers for English teachers. Its emphasis was on questions of curriculum, and it rarely dealt with curriculum topics outside of the areas of English, social studies and history. *TLK*'s interest in the curriculum marked it out from other radical publications and groups, which during this period did not regard curriculum as a central issue. *TLK* stated its position on the curriculum in this way:

> As teachers we must begin to make sense of our roles in a conflict situation by rethinking the curriculum so that children can see and feel that knowledge and learning can represent the power to change and transform the world.[38]

But TLK was not exclusively concerned with curriculum. It overlapped with *Rank & File* (with which it was sympathetic) in considering it worthwhile to be active in the union, and in dealing with the practical issues of campaigning in schools over staff shortages, falling rolls, spending cuts and so forth.

In the quality of its writing and editing, and in its visual presentation, *TLK* was a considerable advance on other radical publications. Although still obviously an amateur production, its imaginative use of Letraset, plentiful use of good photographs, and the high quality of typesetting and printing (*TLK* was almost alone amongst

radical publications in not making a bee-line for the cheapest printer and insisting on the cheapest paper), made it look attractive. This helped to make it easier to sell than other magazines, and its third issue sold about 6,000 copies, a figure all the more impressive in that sales were largely confined to London. Subsequently sales settled down at around 4,000 copies per issue.

TLK's strength was that it tried to interpret the developing radical critique for practising teachers. It explored the implications for them of the debates about testing, intelligence, the politics of literacy, the limits of curricular reform, discipline, language, truancy, living history, racism and sexism. *TLK* offered ideas to teachers whose most immediate problem was 'what do I do Monday?'[39]

But this practical strength of *TLK* was, in the view of its critics [40], also its weakness. In trying to be practical, it put to one side fundamental questions about the role of schooling in society, about strategy for changing schools, and about whether individual teachers, or groups of teachers, *can* offer their pupils a significantly different experience from that offered by conventional teachers. What its pages seemed to lack was a coherent overall theory or philosophy. The next three publications we shall be considering were all concerned with this problem of theory - in differing ways.

HARD CHEESE

Hard Cheese started out as an alternative, not to other radical publications, but to the established theoretical journals of education. It was started by Ted Bowden at London's Goldsmith's College, who

argued in the editorial of the first issue (January 1973) that these established journals were too exclusive in terms of readership, in terms of what kinds of people were 'allowed' to write for them, in terms of the kinds of views which could be expressed in them, as well as in terms of cover price and circulation.

Influenced by the 'new sociology of education', *Hard Cheese* sought to break down the barriers between sociology, philosophy, psychology, history and politics. It rejected the orthodox model of academics as disinterested pursuers of truth who publish their findings regardless of whether they may be supportive of any particular cause, radical or conservative. The writers in *Hard Cheese* tended to declare their political commitments at the outset, and assumed that their readers would share these commitments. As the authors of *Unpopular Education* put it some years later:

> Like all students of social developments, we stand inside the social relations we describe, not outside them. We have consciously taken sides and have not held back from arguing political preferences. In particular, we have been influenced by a growing sense of the need for a more adequate socialist politics of education.[41]

Whilst other radical publications had editorial boards or collectives, *Hard Cheese* was produced by just one person. (In every case those editorial boards were self-appointed with the exception of *Rank & File*, whose editorial board was, for the early issues, elected by supporters at open meetings, and later appointed by the elected executive committee). This placed a heavy load on Bowden, and only four issues of the journal appeared over a period of three years, the final issue (numbered 4/5) being in November 1975.

The fact that *Hard Cheese* achieved a circulation of over 2,500 suggests that there was at that time a substantial interest in radical

theory of education. But it made few concessions to its readers. Whereas other journals chose a 24-page A4 format and made an attempt to be visually interesting, *Hard Cheese* was A5 in size and ran to as many as 120 pages of densely-typed material. There was no art-work at all. There was no attempt, in terms of format or presentation, to break down the belief, common amongst teachers, that 'theory is boring'. Bowden was determined not to reject contributions on the basis of length or style - a fault he perceived in orthodox academic journals.

The approach of many, though not all, of the articles was ethnomethodological; that is, the writers treated educational questions by observing and reporting the perceptions and descriptions of ordinary people of these questions. Articles dealt with, for example, youth work, failure at school, truancy, how teachers perceive children, the raising of the school leaving age. Many of the articles, although theoretical, described the 'real world' of schools and young people: they were about youngsters who swear, truant, get bored, fight, get in trouble with the law, masturbate, and listen to pop music. Most *Hard Cheese* articles had the 'oppositional' stance which I described in chapter 1. They were concerned to criticise orthodox theory, or offer a theoretical critique of orthodox practice. In contrast to *TLK*, there was little attempt to show how radical theory might inform radical practice, whether in ordinary schools or elsewhere. *Hard Cheese* never commented on current affairs, and it rarely acknowledged that it was part of a wider radical movement. It made no suggestions for taking the theoretical debate beyond the printing of unrelated articles. Bowden, in fact, took his editorial role to the limit of non-interventionism: he simply waited for anyone to send him articles, and when there were enough, printed an issue. As a result, there was a 17-month gap between the second and the third issues.

The pages of *Hard Cheese* represent some of the best attempts of radicals in this period to work out soundly-based theory of education. The four issues included several articles of more than passing interest and, taken together, the series remains a valuable source for those interested in radical ideas about education. It is unlikely, however, that it helped to break down that distrust of theorising which is endemic amongst British teachers:

> Dr. Moss represented English empiricism at its most apoplectic. Any kind of intellectual elaboration seemed to him the mark of the devious, tragically over-brainy intellectual. He wanted to save us from it.[42]

nor convince the young teachers who were attracted, briefly, in large numbers to radicalism that theory can be exciting. If they had been put off theory by their college courses, they would have found the articles in *Hard Cheese* scarcely more appetising, not only because of the presentation, but because of their impenetrable language and unrestrained (and unexplained) use of specialist jargon. [43]

RADICAL EDUCATION

Radical Education, first published in the autumn of 1974, was an explicit attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It was the only radical journal whose editorial board included school teachers and lecturers from further and higher education. The group formed in 1973 when a small group of polytechnic lecturers, who had started a Radical Education Group, met up with six people who had formerly been on the editorial board of *Rank & File*. Later the group was joined by a small number of university lecturers in education. In its preliminary broadsheet, the group stated:

> In the past decade or so, education has decisively entered the arena of political controversy. No longer is there anything more than a thinly veiled consensus on the aims of education or on its methods

> and content... *Radical Education* seeks to give voice to the revolt against the educational system of today, and assist in building a new structure for the education of future generations.

The broadsheet listed the journal's aims as (a) providing a focus for the disillusion and frustration felt by increasing numbers of teachers, especially young teachers; (b) attempting to build a socialist critique of education; (c) helping to give a lead to the growing movement of rejection of current educational forms; (d) providing a forum for teachers and students who are critical of the present educational system; (e) confronting the day to day problems faced by teachers, and suggesting strategies, particularly collective ones, for dealing with these problems; and (f) serving as a notice board for the numerous radical events and movements in Britain and overseas. In brief, its hope was to fulfil all the functions which *Libertarian Education*, *Rank & File*, *Teaching London Kids* and *Hard Cheese* nearly, but not quite, fulfilled.

In the editorial of the first issue the editorial board, echoing Ken Worpole three years earlier (see page 91 above) stressed the importance it attached to theory:

> It is our contention that there is no socialist theory of education. Of course, socialists have ideas about education; but there is no coherent theory in the way that there is a socialist theory of the capitalist economy or a socialist theory of history... What then do we mean by a socialist theory of education? There are two parts to this. One is how education *ought to be* in a socialist society...The other part of the question - informed by the first, but different from it - is an analysis of the process of education as it is now.[44]

Thirteen issues of *Radical Education* were published between 1974 and 1979, the sales averaging between 3,000 and 4,000 per issue. Like other radical journals, it was handicapped by a shortage of people doing the work, a shortage of funds, and lack of an effective system of distribution. Given this, it did well to establish a sizeable readership for a journal with an avowed commitment to theoretical

discussion. Compared with other journals, *Radical Education* got a good deal of feedback from its readers in terms of letters. Many of them were critical and suggest that the journal was having difficulty in locating a constituency, as these correspondents indicated:

> I bought *Radical Education* in the hope of finding people with sympathetic views to mine and stimulating articles about practical alternative approaches to education. I've been disappointed; all I've heard are left-wing intellectuals discussing "education" and "reform" and "the development of a socialist strategy". I expected to read articles by parents, children and other non-specialists, but your paper appears to be a limited one directed to a limited audience.[45]

and

> Your articles, I feel, are being read by the converted. I do not believe that the supporter of a firm elitist 'education' system would be swayed by your magazine, in fact the opposite would probably occur. You may gain the support of a few 'don't knows' but on the whole what is happening is that your readers are taking the ideas and points that you are putting forward, kicking them around and obtaining their own interpretation of a socialist philosophy on education.[46]

The editorial board did not find it easy to steer its way through such conflicting demands. In the editorial of issue 9 (Summer 1977) they apologised to readers that earlier issues had "a rather philosophical character removed from any need to debate a concrete strategy". But the editorial of issue 13 (the last) said "We need to develop a Socialist Theory of Education..." which was what they had said in the first issue. It is hard to see how the task of developing a socialist theory of education could be undertaken without the debate having something of a 'philosophical character'.

In fact *Radical Education* had been launched at an inauspicious time. Although 1974 had seen the return of Labour to government, this was not to prove helpful to radicals in education. Reginald Prentice, later to defect to the Conservative Party, was the Secretary of State for Education. The world economic recession sparked off by the 1973 Yom Kippur war and the huge increase in oil prices forced the Labour

administration to adopt policies of economic stringency. The question of 'fighting the cuts' in planned educational expenditure became the central concern of left-wingers. This put economic considerations at the top of the agenda at the moment when *Radical Education* had hoped to move beyond the simplistic economism which had characterised *Rank & File*. Thus the editorial of the seventh issue (Winter 1976) reported that

> The left is now fighting to retain past achievements in the face of concerted ruling class attacks.

But these 'past achievements' which the left was now 'fighting to retain' were precisely what *Radical Education* had initially set out to attack when it said "*Radical Education* seeks to give voice to the revolt against the educational system of today".

The pressure to produce 'concrete strategy' rather than 'philosophy' was thus a result of circumstances which forced *Radical Education* into a stance of responding defensively to immediate events.

When reviewing radical journals it is always necessary to keep in sharp focus the practical problems of producing them. Over its five years the editorial board of *Radical Education* changed completely as the original members dropped out for various reasons. Virtually anyone who put themself forward was accepted on to the editorial board, and there was no guarantee that new members would share the interests and aspirations of the earlier members. Hence there was a problem of continuity. Because members of the editorial board had many other pressures on their time, their input into the journal was limited. Whilst some journals (notably *Rank & File* and *Teaching London Kids*) planned future issues and commissioned articles, others (*Libertarian Education*, *Hard Cheese* and *Radical Education*) were less able to do so

and relied heavily on readers sending in unsolicited material. This was a particular problem in *Radical Education*'s case since the fulfilment of its original aims would seem to have necessitated careful long-term planning and commissioning of articles.

Nonetheless, the thirteen issues of *Radical Education* contained some interesting articles. Most notable were a valuable series about the history of education [47] which disclosed aspects of history which were not mentioned in the text-books. There was also substantial international coverage, with reports on developments in Finland, Chile, Portugal, Poland, China, South Africa, Germany and Spain. Other articles sketched out lines of debate on gender; the politics of literacy; the philosophy of R.S.Peters; the mechanisms by which schools serve the status quo; the 'new sociology'; the work of Paulo Freire; the class position of teachers; racism; behaviour modification; curriculum; IQ; and the question of whether radicals were for or against progressive education.

The journal also carried a 'Notices' section which comprehensively listed the radical education organisations and offered them the opportunity to make a brief statement of their aims: it represented a non-sectarian attempt to establish a sense of common cause within the movement, and in fact Rank & File was the only organisation which declined the invitation to make use of the 'Notices' section.

Radical Education cannot be adjudged to have succeeded in its aim of developing a socialist theory of education. It perhaps underestimated the size of its task, and its format - it wanted lively, readable articles of no more than 1.500 words in length - was not appropriate

for the purpose. What it did achieve was to put theory on the agenda of the radical movement.

TEACHERS ACTION

Whereas *Radical Education* started out by saying that there was, as yet, no socialist theory of education, *Teachers Action* appeared in the same year announcing that it had worked out a socialist theory. The problem of theory having been solved, what was needed now was *action*: hence the title of the new journal.

The origins of the *Teachers Action* analysis lay in the thinking of black militants associated with *Race Today*, prominent amongst whom were Darcus Howe, John La Rose and Farrukh Dhondy. Their analysis drew on Marxism but (unusually in Britain) not Leninism: in particular they rejected the notion of a 'vanguard party' and were critical of groups (such as Rank & File) who aspired to a leadership role. They put their faith, instead, in the self-initiating collective actions of the masses.

The Teachers Action Collective (all of whom were teachers) set out their analysis in a pamphlet *Teachers and the Economy* in 1975. As the title suggests, their view of education was strongly related to economic considerations. Their theory may be summarised as follows. An analysis of schools must follow a Marxian analysis of industrial production. Teachers are workers, who sell their labour power to an employer (the state, acting on behalf of the capitalist class) who extracts surplus value from them. School students are also workers, but they are doubly exploited (like housewives) because they are

unwaged. The most correct and first demand of school students should be a demand for a wage. (In the same way, *Race Today* proposed the demand for wages for housework). The teacher is a productive worker: "The teacher produces a trained, skilled, disciplined labour force which is exchanged against capital not only to reproduce the value of that labour-power, but to produce surplus value" [48].

The function of schooling in the capitalist economy, the analysis continued, is fourfold: one, to skill (i.e. train) the future labour force; two, to grade the future labour force; three, to discipline the future labour force; and four, the custodial role of looking after children while their parents go to work. Young teachers "who enter schools full of ideas and ideals about education" get a shock: "They want to interest, excite, teach about life", but they find that this is not what happens in school. Instead, they find unwaged pupils who are, like other working class people, struggling against exploitation at their place of work by refusing to learn, by acts of indiscipline and vandalism and so forth. The highest form of action is pupil revolt.

Like the deschoolers, *Teachers Action* insisted that a distinction be made between schooling and education. In the early issues of the journal, they were reluctant to discuss education at all, and were critical of journals like *Teaching London Kids* which encouraged the 'myth' that teachers are paid to improve the education of children. They were also critical of sociologists, sociology being essentially a bourgeois study which can only divert the attention of workers from real objectives. (But, in fact, they had a certain amount in common with the 'new sociology' of the time, particularly in their challenging of the taken-for-granted presumption that the school is a benevolent institution.) *Teachers Action* was particularly concerned to correct the

mistaken analysis of education promulgated by other left-wingers: often, they claimed, the right- wing had a more acute understanding of what goes on in schools.

It is not within the scope of this study to enter into a discussion of this analysis. It is worth, however, pointing out how much it owes to the anarchist-syndicalist tradition, although the Teachers Action Collective did not appear to be aware of this. Unlike the other radical groups of teachers (with the exception of *Libertarian Education* which was ambivalent on the issue) *Teachers Action* did not believe in working within the union, relying instead on the self-organisation of workers (unofficial strikes were the ideal). Their interpretation of vandalism and indiscipline as acts of class struggle might have come straight from Wilhelm Reich:

> Everything that is in contradiction with the bourgeois order, that contains the seeds of revolt, may be regarded as an element of class consciousness... The fundamental problem for a correct psychological approach is not why a hungry man steals, but why he doesn't steal... [49]

And *Teachers Action*'s idea of pupils as workers had been mooted some years earlier by the anarchist Keith Paton:

> ...the driver of a private automobile, the patient who submits to hospitalisation, or the pupil in the classroom must now be seen as a new class of employees.[50]

Whatever the merits of the *Teachers Action* analysis, they offered three insights which were relevant to a radical theory of education. First, they accepted the idea that capitalism has implicit requirements of schooling, but pointed to the possibility that these requirements are not necessarily achieved [51]. Whilst most left-wing theories assumed that the objective and the achievement of it were synonymous, *Teachers Action* pointed to the conscious refusal of school students - especially black youth in city schools - to comply with the process they were expected to go through. They ascribed conscious action to

school students, seeing indiscipline, vandalism and classroom disruption not as 'mindless' action, but as behaviour with a sound rationale. They emphasised, to use Douglas Hollly's words "human consciousness and the co-operation or revolt of *people* in ...the educative process" [52]. And they counted children as people.

Second, they emphasised the custodial role of schooling - a role which other radicals tended to overlook. And thirdly, they postulated mass collective action as the motor force of social change, independent of vanguard parties and trade union leaderships.

In all, 14 issues of *Teachers Action* were published between 1974 and 1981. Unlike other journals, it was not a forum for debate. The Teachers Action Collective had a line to proselytise, and most articles were discussed, revised and approved by the Collective as a correct representation of their views before being published. By issue 6 (Autumn 1976) they relented to the extent of opening a letters column, but this was only for correspondents who agreed with the general position of the Collective. Articles in the journal were either re-statements of their fundamental propositions, or interpretations of the issues of the day within the framework of their analysis, or reporting of incidents which supported their analysis.

I have not been able to ascertain the circulation figures of *Teachers Action*, but there is no evidence to suggest that it gained a large following within the radical movement. Whatever view one may take of their theory, the rigidity of their stance and the uncompromising language of their publications was hardly calculated to win converts. This is not, of course, to say that the part played by *Teachers Action* in the radical movement may be disregarded. The fact that such a

journal emerged and sustained itself for seven years in this period is in itself significant: it represents a serious attempt by radical teachers to understand their predicament and act in the world in order to change it.

TEACHERS AGAINST RACISM

For white radicals the question of racism in schools had been brought powerfully to their attention by Jonathan Kozol's book *Death at an Early Age* which was published in Britain in 1968. But the radical movement was slow to take up the issue. In 1971 a series of meetings was organised by London's New Beacon Bookshop to discuss racism in schools. There were two tangible outcomes: one was Bernard Coard's influential pamphlet *How The West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal* (1972); the other was the formation of the Teachers Against Racism group (TAR) which, over the next two years, published four issues of a bulletin also called *Teachers Against Racism*. The group held regular meetings in London - and occasionally elsewhere - which discussed the questions of black studies, racism in children's books, African and Caribbean history, and the treatment of black children in schools.

Such issues were explored further in the bulletin. TAR made no attempt to offer a politically neutral approach to questions of race [53], making it clear that it was part of the radical movement. Thus, the Spring 1973 issue of the bulletin carried a long obituary of the Guinean revolutionary leader Amilcar Cabral who had been murdered in January of that year.

In 1973 *Teachers Against Racism* fell victim to the perennial problem of radical groups - lack of person-power to keep the group, and bulletin, operating. Its work was in part continued by the National Association for Multiracial Education and its journal *Issues in Multiracial Education* and, later in the decade, by the more militant All-London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism (ALTARF).

Although TAR was only a small group and its bulletin never achieved its potential circulation, it can perhaps take some satisfaction from the first sentence of the preface to the 1985 Swann Report *Education for All*:

> The origins of this committee can be traced back to the concern expressed by the West Indian community during the late 1960s and early 1970s about the academic performance of their children. [54]

TAR can take some credit for having put the question of racism onto the agenda, not only of the radical movement but, eventually, of a majority of schools.

Because racism has been taken up by radicals and kept on the agenda in the 1980s, I will give it relatively little attention in this study. This is not to say that I do not consider it important: on the contrary, I share the view that it is one of the most crucial issues facing our society today.

THE RIGHT TO LEARN GROUP

Unlike the other groups we have considered so far, the Right to Learn group did not publish a journal. It was a small group of London teachers which published two pamphlets - *The Right to Learn* in July

1973 and *School Does Matter* in May 1974. The concern of the group was that inner city schools weren't working:

> We believe that the present staggeringly low standards of literacy in Inner London schools...are the results of poor expectations, poor teaching and working conditions, and poor organisation in the schools, rather than of any natural deficit in the children concerned.[55]

The group firmly rejected psychological and sociological explanations for working class failure (low IQ, cultural deprivation, linguistic deprivation, 'bad homes', the supposed incompatibility of working class culture and school knowledge). Instead, they asserted that just when working class children were for the first time being offered full educational opportunity - with the coming of comprehensive schools and the raising of the school-leaving age - this opportunity was being snatched back from them by the *Black Paper* traditionalists on the one hand and 'community educationists' such as Eric Midwinter on the other. They were scornful of the progressives' cry for 'relevance' in the curriculum; in their view it was no different from Geoffrey Bantock's case for a 'diluted' curriculum for working class children [56].

The Right to Learn group did not share the radicals' critique of the curriculum; they had no quarrel with the traditional curriculum, and opposed the fashionable integration of subjects. Nor did they support 'children's liberation'. In their view

> Children are not at the point of being free to choose what they should learn; they don't have the knowledge, experience and consciousness to give them that freedom.[57]

but the group did believe in seeking and valuing children's opinions on such matters.

What was radical about the Right to Learn group was their simple proposal: they wanted the ILEA to give them a medium-sized comprehensive school to run in the way they thought necessary if

working class children were to match the academic performance of middle class children. In their school they proposed to abolish hierarchy and division of labour which they saw as the bug-bear of normal schools. Like Rank & File they considered teaching to be the most important job in the school and therefore "all functions of the school administration will be shared equally by all the teachers; executive power will be in the hands of the whole staff." Salaries were to be equalised (as they were at White Lion Street Free School - see chapter 6). The driving purpose would be to *expect* high achievement from every child in the classroom [58]. Diversions from this purpose - such as pastoral care and 'socialisation' - were frowned upon. The school would be unstreamed, although setted in certain subjects, particularly mathematics. Parental involvement would be encouraged.

In contrast to most radical groups, the Right to Learn group posed a clear and realisable way forward. Whether it would have worked or not we shall never know because, although there was a degree of sympathy for the proposal in ILEA's County Hall, the ILEA could not see its way through the administrative problems:

> To give one group of teachers, however admirable, the chance of running a school in their own way, the education authority has arbitrarily to dispossess another group of teachers of their right to teach in the school in question.[59]

The radical riposte was that such difficulties had not seemed to trouble the ILEA when it came to closing Risinghill School [60].

The Right to Learn group had much in common with the 'quantitist' position within Rank & File. They did not, however, sympathise with Rank & File because they did not share the political outlooks of the International Socialism group or the International Marxist Group.

Equally, Rank & File did not support the Right to Learn group because their strategy did not involve the union.

RESOURCES PROGRAMME FOR CHANGE IN EDUCATION

A short-lived, but none-the-less interesting, enterprise was the Resources Programme for Change in Education (RPCE) which was launched in 1973. Its initial statement described it as

> ...an extra-curricular college of education...for students and teachers who feel inadequately prepared to deal with the problems they face in teaching and who are willing to take an active part in helping themselves and others.

Like *Teaching London Kids*, RPCE believed that there was scope for innovatory practice in schooling. Their plan was to bring teachers - and others working with young people - together to share their experiences and develop ideas; and to follow this up by producing the resources which these new ideas would require. Actually, RPCE overlapped considerably with what good teachers' centres were doing at that time. That RPCE felt the need to have a programme independent of teachers' centres was, perhaps, a measure of the oppositionism of the time. Teachers' centres, run by Local Education Authorities, were associated with officialdom, with teacher professionalism. RPCE - which held many of its meetings at the Architectural Association in London - welcomed not only teachers but students, play workers, community workers, artists and others. They were anxious to demolish boundaries - something which did not appear to be an aim of teachers' centres. And there was the desire, which all radical groups shared, to maintain their independence, to avoid being required to make compromises.

The early hope of RPCE was to gain charitable funding to pay full-time workers and establish a real centre. They were unsuccessful in this, and RPCE was limited to holding a number of meetings and publishing several issues of a newsletter which served as an information exchange. In March 1974, for example, RPCE held a one-day workshop on 'How to live with a hostile school'. This, like other RPCE ventures, was different in style from most other radical education meetings in that it drew on the encounter group/humanistic psychology therapy workshop techniques being increasingly imported from the USA at the time. RPCE called them 'interaction experiences'. If you went to a Rank & File meeting in those days, you sat in silence and listened to the speakers. ('Sitting in silence and listening' was one of the things radicals criticised in orthodox schooling; but it took many radicals a long time to realise the contradiction between the form of their own events and the content of their message). At a RPCE workshop you were more likely to end up with shoes off punching a cushion.

For familiar reasons - lack of time, money and energy, and a failure to clarify aims - RPCE closed in July 1974. Its final newsletter reflected that "...it became increasingly vague and shapeless and failed to enable people to contribute and focus energy."

SOCIALIST TEACHERS ALLIANCE

By 1975 political tensions within Rank & File had reached breaking-point, and the International Marxist Group (IMG) teachers and a number of non-IS supporters of Rank & File formed the 'Socialist Teachers Conference'. Its bulletin explained that the Conference arose

> ...from dissatisfaction felt by certain delegates at the 1975 NUT conference over the performance of the Left as a whole. There was a

> feeling that Rank & File's politics were inadequate to the situation confronting the Left, and that the way that Rank & File operated made it very difficult to challenge these politics from within.

In 1976 the Conference became the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) which, in 1977, launched a new journal, *Socialist Teacher*. The editorial of the first issue said:

> The Socialist Teachers Alliance has set itself two main objectives. Firstly we seek to establish unity in action among the mass of teachers around a programme of basic demands, and, secondly, we hope to develop a coherent analysis of current educational practice and the role and position of teachers and the educational system within the present social framework.[61]

The STA and *Socialist Teacher* were effectively a re-modelling of Rank & File, and those not versed in the subtleties of Trotskyist politics would find it hard to detect significant differences between the two. From the point of view of this study, however, there was a refreshing difference in that

> ...the Socialist Teachers Alliance does not pretend to have all the answers. There are many aspects of the wide-ranging debate about education on which socialists disagree, or have not yet come to definite conclusions, and there are many teachers who might be reluctant to accept the label 'socialist' who share our orientation...So we do not intend to produce a journal full of dogmatic assertions and black and white judgements... [62]

Whilst following in Rank & File's footsteps in being primarily concerned with issues of the resourcing of the education service, teachers' salaries and conditions, and trade unionism, the pages of *Socialist Teacher* carried several articles in each issue on educational questions. These articles demonstrate a greater sophistication than anything the radical movement had been producing five years earlier; if the radical left was still awaiting the 'coherent socialist theory of education' which *Radical Education* had looked for, it was clear that fragements of such a theory were beginning to be put into place. The influences which were being assimilated can be seen from the list of speakers at the STA's 'Politics of Education' conference in April 1978:

Raymond Williams, Geoff Esland (who had played a major part in the development of the Open University 'Schooling and Society' course), Dann Finn and Neil Grant of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Simon Frith, John Holloway and Sol Picciotto of the Conference of Socialist Economists, and sociologists Michael Young and Ian Hextall. What is clear from this speakers' list, and it is also clear from the pages of *Socialist Teacher*, is that while the developing analysis was drawing on the serious work of political economists, historians, sociologists and political theorists (and, although this was not reflected on the conference platform where all the speakers were men, also the theory generated by the women's movement), any philosophical and psychological input was almost entirely absent. What was also absent - and I shall discuss this further in chapter 5 - was the perspective of 'seeing things from the point of view of the child', a perspective which had been emphasised earlier by writers like Neill, Holt, Dennison, Kohl and Mackenzie, and by the school students' movement and the children's rights campaigners (see next chapter). A critic of *Socialist Teacher* might have grounds for thinking that its editors considered the interests of teachers to be more important than the interests of children. It is, of course, an explicit presumption of teacher trade unionists that what is good for teachers is *ipso facto* good for children (witness the NUT publicity poster "Value Your Child - Value Your Child's Teacher"). But although this presumption was sharply challenged in the earlier years of the radical movement, it remained unexamined by *Socialist Teacher*. It is a measure of the entrenched 'oppositionism' that nowhere in *Socialist Teacher* (nor in Rank & File) is there any examination, critical or otherwise, of the notion of the public servant whose first duty is to the client. (Radical social workers, had, by contrast, taken this question seriously [63].)

LONDON EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES PROGRAMME

In a field such as education, radicals often find themselves working in isolation from others of like mind. Although in the 1960s and 1970s many a secondary school staffroom, particularly in cities, had its cluster of radicals, there must have been many radicals - especially in rural schools and in primary schools - who felt their isolation keenly. It was an important function of the groups we have so far discussed that they brought like-minded people together and provided some sense of common identity and shared purpose.

The early 1970s saw a mushrooming of alternative education projects, truancy centres, special units and 'off-site units', all of which attempted to provide schooling for young people outside of conventional schools. I shall have a little more to say about these in chapter 4. These projects worked with children who did not 'fit in' with mainstream schooling, and it was often the case that they were staffed by teachers who themselves did not easily 'fit in' to mainstream schools [64]. They tended to be people with a radical disposition who were attracted by the opportunities for experiment, self-direction, flexibility and informality which alternative projects offered. These projects were generally small - typically with just two or three teachers - and brought their own problems of isolation.

In July 1974 representatives of fifteen such projects in London set up the London Educational Alternatives Programme (LEAP). Over the following years, and into the 1980s, LEAP provided a forum for discussion, published occasional newsletters, and lobbied the ILEA on matters of concern to teachers in alternative projects and the youngsters in their care.

LEAP believed - and this was its contribution to the radical movement - that the work done in alternative projects could serve as a model which would lead schools to re-examine their policies and practices. LEAP (or, to be more precise, a majority of its members) argued that phenomena like 'truancy' or 'disruption' could not be attributed to some failing within the individual truant or disruptive pupil, but were an understandable reaction of some children to the inadequacies of schools. What was needed was school reform, and by working successfully with the youngsters in question, LEAP members hoped to demonstrate the directions in which such reform might go.

In this respect LEAP may be bracketed with the Free School movement - and indeed several free schools were members of LEAP. Most of the projects associated with LEAP were run along free school lines. It is difficult to assess how far alternative projects were successful in their aim of influencing mainstream schooling. The very fact of their isolation meant that, however good their practice, it was not readily observed by schools. For their part, schools were undoubtedly happy to have 'problem children' taken off their hands, and it is arguable that the effect of alternative projects was to reduce rather than increase the pressure on schools to examine critically their practices and policies.

SOCIETY OF TEACHERS OPPOSED TO PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT

In concluding this discussion of teachers' groups, mention must be made of the Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment (STOPP). Founded in 1968, STOPP was never a large organisation in terms of membership, but it included in its ranks some articulate and effective lobbyists. It was well-organised and kept up a flow of well-produced

reports and skilfully conducted campaigns which, in the long run, proved effective. Crucial to its success was its ability to make use of the media which was never (apart from an unfortunate libel case in 1984) given the opportunity to tar STOPP with the brush it kept for other radicals.

This is not to say that STOPP's activists were not sympathetic with the radical movement - they were, individually, involved in other radical groups. But STOPP set itself a single objective - the abolition of corporal punishment - and set about winning broadly-based support for this. It did not spurn the 'proper channels', promoting for example a 'Protection of Minors' Bill which Baroness Wootton introduced into the House of Lords in 1973 (it was defeated on its second reading by 67 votes to 51). It did not alienate potential support by taking a stand on other issues, and only occasionally forayed outside the strict limits of its brief, for example when it presented the premiere in 1973 of Leila Berg's play about Risinghill *Raising Hell*.

The reward for this has been that STOPP has been successful in a way that no other radical grouping can claim to have been. By 1986 it had largely achieved its objective, although it continues (at the time of writing - 1987) to campaign against the physical punishment of children in independent schools and elsewhere in society. Radicals might do well to ponder the lessons which could be learned from the success of this single-minded single-issue campaign.

INDIVIDUALS

It may have been noticed that in this chapter I have usually not named the individuals involved in the various groups. I decided not to

do so for a number of reasons, not least of which was that it would be invidious to mention some people and not mention others. But, of course, the key roles played in each group by particular individuals ought to be recognised.

It will also have been noted that I have not covered in this study the activities of individual radical teachers or groups of radical teachers within their schools. Interesting as that would be to research, it would have added a dimension to my study which I was simply not in a position to tackle.

I do want, however, to refer to a few people who played particularly significant roles. There has been a line of radical headteachers in the post-war period -from Alex Bloom and E.F.O'Neill through Michael Duane, Robert Mackenzie and Tim M cMullen, to Philip Toogood, many of whom got into trouble by trying to reform specific schools [65]. More than any others, perhaps, they laid their heads on the line (if the pun may be forgiven) for the radical cause, and in most cases suffered for it. The contribution of these individuals to British education has been important, but they have not been rewarded by public acclaim or seats in the House of Lords.

But pride of place must surely go to A.S.Neill. In any account of education in the 20th century Neill must be afforded a prominent place. At several points in later chapters I take issue with Neill, but I hope that will not be taken to indicate any desire on my part to diminish his achievements. I do not think Neill should be elevated to 'guru' status, and I hope it does nothing to detract from the greatness of his life's work to disagree with some of the things he wrote.

That completes our survey of radical teachers. Several of the key issues - 'radical dilemmas' - which have arisen in this chapter will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. Before that, however, I will look at the school students' movement and a number of other radical groupings, and, in chapter 4, free schools.

NOTES

1. A good example, which foreshadowed things to come, was Martin Daniel 'A Charter for the Unfree Child' in *Anarchy* 21 (1962).
2. Interview with Peter Ford, 9 July 1986.
3. *Bulletin of the Libertarian Teachers Association* 3, July 1967, page 3.
4. See reports in *The Teacher* 11 October 1968 and *Freedom* 17 August 1968.
5. See Joreen Freeman *The Tyranny of Structurelessness.*
6. The first four issues were called *Bulletin of the Libertarian Teachers Association.*
7. Michael P. Smith *The Libertarians and Education* page 114.
8. Peter Woods 'Strategies, Commitment and Identity' in L.Barton and S.Walker (eds) *Schools, Teachers and Teaching.*
9. M. Hammersley 'Teacher Perspectives' Unit 9 of Open University course E202 Schooling and Society.
10. Margaret Mead 'Our Educational Emphases in Primitive Perspective' in *American Journal of Sociology* Vol 48, 1942-4, page 634.
11. John Holt *Instead of Education.*
12. Michael P. Smith *op cit* page 132. *Libertarian Education*'s first response to deschooling came with a critique of Illich by Nicholas Walter in *Libertarian Education* 16.

13. Janet Gooch 'Community Schools' in *Libertarian Teacher* 8, page 4.

14. Editorial, *Libertarian Education* 11.

15. Val Hennessy, letter, *Libertarian Education* 19.

16. This interest in sexuality was nothing new: as Karl Teschitz (*Sex-Pol Essays*) had noted in 1937: "it has always been the anarchists who of all the groups put most emphasis on the liberation and revolutionising of personal life - and who therefore were quick to take up the problem of sexual liberation."

17. For another view of *Libertarian Education* see Mike Smith *The Underground and Education.*

18. The International Socialism group, which changed its name to the Socialist Workers Party in the mid-1970s, was one of a number of descendants of the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party which was active in the post-1945 period. Others were the Socialist Labour League (now the Workers Revolutionary Party), the Revolutionary Socialist League (related to the Militant Tendency) and the International Marxist Group.

19. *Rank & File* 1, page 2.

20. See Vincent Burke *Teachers in Turmoil.*

21. Judith Weymont, letter, *Rank & File* 4, page 5.

22. David Spencer, letter, *Rank & File* 4, page 6.

23. The 'Moscow gold' theory, for all its improbability, is continually revived by people who know nothing about radical groups. A recent example can be found in Len Deighton *Mexico Set.*

24. Judy Palfreman 'Black Paper 2' in *Rank & File* 8; Martin Hoyles 'Conflict Theory and Educational Institutions' in *Rank & File* 11; Chanie Rosenberg 'School Self-Government: The Russian Experiment' in *Rank & File* 17.

25. Rank & File *A Teachers' Charter* page 2.

26. See *Freedom* Vol 29 No 20, 29 June 1968.

27. Rank & File *Democracy in Schools* page 23.

28. See *Rank & File* 17, pages 6-8.

29. This switch to the 'agitational paper' is discussed by Ken Jones in *Beyond Progressive Education* page 116.

30. *The Fight for Education: Rank & File Occasional Journal* No 1, Spring 1977, page 28.

31. This 'vanguardism' was attacked by the *Teachers Action* group - see page 105.

32. See, for example, Chanie Rosenberg *Education and Society.* Marx's concept of 'base and superstructure' was elaborated in his *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy* but it was far from simplistic.

33. Ken Worpole 'Towards a Socialist Critique of Secondary Education' in *Rank & File* 14.

34. Gerald Grace 'Facing the Contradictions' in *Teaching London Kids* 15, page 10.

35. Gabriel Chanan 'Gabriel Replies' in *Radical Education* 5, page 20.

36. For example Douglas Barnes, James Britton and Harold Rosen *Language, the Learner and the School*; Carol Burgess and others *Understanding Children Writing.*

37. See Gerald Grace *Education and the City.*

38. Editorial, *Teaching London Kids* 3, page 2.

39. John Holt was also going through a (temporary) phase of new realism: his book *What Do I Do Monday?* was published in Britain in 1971.

40. For example, John Clossick in Rank & File 30, page 7; and *Teachers Action* 8, page 18.

41. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies *Unpopular Education* page 13.

42. Edward Blishen *A Nest of Teachers* page 43.

43. For further discussion of the content of *Hard Cheese*, see Mike Smith *op cit.*

44. Editorial, *Radical Education* 1, page 2.

45. Sue Symons, letter, *Radical Education* 7, page 8.

46. Howard Walter, letter, *Radical Education* 8, page 19.

47. Ian Hamilton 'Agitate Educate Organise' in *Radical Education* 1, page 4; Alan Miles 'An Experiment in Germany' in *Radical Education* 2, page 6; Martin Lawn 'Educational Worker' in *Radical Education* 2, page 8; Roger Greenhough 'In on the Act' in *Radical Education* 3, page 15; Ken Jones 'Progressive Education and the Working Class' in *Radical Education* 6, page 6; Padraig Pearse 'The Murder Machine' in *Radical Education* 6, page 14; Richard Johnson 'Really Useful Knowledge' in *Radical Education* 7, page 20 and 8, page 22.

48. Teachers Action Collective *Teachers and the Economy* page 7.

49. Wilhelm Reich *What is Class Consciousness?* page 25.

50. Keith Paton *The Great Brain Robbery* page 59.

51. This point had been made a few years earlier in Søren Hansen and Jesper Jensen *The Little Red Schoolbook* page 13.

52. Douglas Holly *Society, Schools and Humanity* page 29. The point is elaborated by Ted Benton 'Education and Politics' in Douglas Holly (ed) *Education or Domination* page 15.

53. Contrast Julia McNeal and Margaret Rogers (eds) *The Multi-Racial School.*

54. *Education for All*, The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups (The Swann Report) page vii.

55. Right to Learn Group *School Does Matter* page 34.

56. G.H. Bantock 'Towards a Theory of Popular Education' in R. Hooper (ed) *The Curriculum: Context, Design and Development.*

57. Right to Learn Group *op cit* page 36.

58. Roy Nash *Teacher Expectations and Pupil Learning* explores the possibilities of this emphasis.

59. Peter Newsam 'The Good Old Days' in *Education* 3 March 1978.

60. See Leila Berg *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School.*

61. *Socialist Teacher* 1, page 16.

62. *Ibid*

63. See *Case Con* passim.

64. David Head (ed) *Free Way to Learning* page 8.

65. See Gerard Holmes *The Idiot Teacher* on E.F.O'Neill; Leila Berg *op cit* on Michael Duane; Robert Mackenzie *The Unbowed Head*; John Watts (ed) *The Countesthorpe Experience* on Tim M cMullen; and Philip Toogood *The Head's Tale.*

66. Bruno Bettelheim in Nathan W. Ackerman and others *Summerhill: For and Against.*

APPENDIX

Principles, Aims and Objectives of the Libertarian Teachers Association (1968)

[*SEE NEXT PAGE*]

Libertarian Teachers' Association

Principles, Aims & Objectives

IT SHOULD be understood that the following is not an agreed statement of aims and principles endorsed by all members of the Association. It is unlikely that any such statement could truly represent the varied and changing opinions of such a diffuse group. Partly for this reason, the formulation of 'Aims and Principles' has not been seen as a matter of immediate priority. Nevertheless all individuals linked with the LTA must necessarily accept the word 'libertarian' as descriptive of their attitude to education and it is likely that most would support the general outlines of the statement below—but there is no question of membership hinging on the acceptance of it.

PRINCIPLES, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

(1) Education is to be understood as a continuing process in a healthy life. It is not necessarily enhanced by or inseparable from special people called 'teachers' or special places called 'schools'. True education may in fact be hampered by both. The Libertarian Teachers' Association is concerned with education in its widest sense and also with what is currently going on in institutions specifically designed to promote it—from nursery schools to universities.

(2) At both age-extremes attendance at educational institutions is voluntary, although some provisos should perhaps be placed around the word 'voluntary' in relation both to nursery school children and university students. In the light of the present general educational unrest and the unenthusiastic attitude of many children to the schools they are obliged to attend, the LTA questions the value of making school attendance compulsory, bearing in mind that children who are forced to attend a school that they dislike will be resistant to it and benefit little, whilst on the other hand there would be no need to apply compulsion to make children attend schools that were attractive to them. A change from compulsory to voluntary attendance would mean a revolution in attitudes towards children and techniques of teaching which would affect all sectors of the educational system.

(3) The LTA is in general opposed to the involuntary separation of children either on the basis of sex-difference or alleged intelligence. We, therefore, support co-education and non-streaming in all schools.

(4) Schools, colleges and universities should properly be controlled by those most immediately concerned with them: pupils, parents and teachers; students and lecturers. There are various methods of doing this and a minority of existing educational establishments in this and other countries exemplify ways of moving in this direction. The LTA supports the growth of shared responsibility, pupil-participation, student power and workers' control in schools, colleges and universities. Whilst it may be helpful for practical organisational reasons to relieve busy teachers and lecturers of administrative work, the LTA opposes the traditional power-hierarchy that exists in most schools and colleges. If there is to be a headteacher or principal, his role should be functional and administrative rather than dictatorial.

(5) At this time the existing Unions seem to be obsessed either with largely spurious issues of professional status (for example: the attitude towards teachers auxiliaries and 'unqualified staff') or with salary scales and negotiations, to the exclusion of more fundamental issues. A Union which is structurally dominated by headteachers can hardly be expected to function well from a libertarian viewpoint. Therefore the LTA supports all attempts to democratise the existing Unions or to create a new Union which would be more capable of representing and defending the interests of all teachers.

(6) Whilst acknowledging the problems posed by over-large classes, often

full of children conditioned to respond to force—the LTA is in principle opposed to corporal punishment and all other forms of institutionalised punishment. (This should not be understood to mean that adults should never be angry with children—or never show anger when they feel it.) Even though the effects of the carrot may not seem as insidious as those of the stick, artificial rewards (marks, house points, stars, etc.) do not aid freely motivated learning and are generally needed only because of the compulsory setting in which most teaching takes place.

(7) The current emphasis on competition in education—permeating the whole system but operative particularly through streaming, house systems and examinations—is to be opposed. Examinations imply that knowledge is a kind of 'private property' to be withheld from others and to be used as a lever to gain superiority over them. The LTA supports the critical movement away from examinations and the emphasis on co-operation as an educational aid.

(8) The LTA campaigns for an immediate end to the public schools system, compulsory school uniform, religious indoctrination, and the prefectorial system.

(9) The LTA welcomes and gives support to all experiments inside or outside the official educational system which seem likely to extend the freedoms of those involved—both adults and children.

PRACTICAL PROPOSALS

We recognise that many of the above objectives can only be seen as long-term. Immediate action may seem only remotely related to their achievement. However, the libertarian tactic is essentially direct action in the here-and-now, embodying the ends as means in so far as this is possible. In the light of this, the following suggestions for action are made. These are addressed principally to teachers in schools but could be adapted to apply to lecturers in Training Colleges or Universities.

(i) Try to realise the full implications of what in fact you are doing—or being made to do—at the present time.

(ii) Introduce the voluntary principle at all possible points within the learning situation. Make clear the available options and try to extend them.

(iii) The converse of this: with due circumspection, refrain from personally using coercion or punishments as far as your particular situation permits.

(iv) Try to mobilise that residue of dissident opinion which exists in so many schools, to speak out against the use of corporal punishment, the enforcement of uniform, etc.

(v) Regard with compassion the fact that children are to some extent conditioned to respond to fear and will frequently react with aggression or superficially irresponsible actions when fear is not present.

(vi) Draw attention by all available means to the growing evidence against the effectiveness of authoritarian methods in education.

POSTSCRIPT

All libertarians are concerned with wholesale change in the social structure. It is important to recognise that educational advances will not in themselves inevitably result either in more liberated individuals or a more liberated society. It is only necessary to look at the American educational system, which already contains many of the features that we are proposing above (absence of streaming, informality between teachers and pupils, no uniforms, etc.) to see that it is still an efficient method of preparing the majority of young American citizens to accept with docility a society which is arguably as barbarous as any on the face of the globe. There are many reasons to justify a liberalisation of educational methods—not least of which is an immediate increase in the chances of happiness for those who are having to undergo them—but it is still broadly true that education reflects rather than causes change in the social structure. It is thus essential that libertarian teachers should maintain contact and involvement with other areas of the libertarian movement. The various specific pressure groups which constitute this movement are ultimately interdependent and no advance towards freedom in any particular social field will be lasting unless matched and supported by similar pressures elsewhere.

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CHAPTER 3

A SURVEY OF THE MOVEMENT - SCHOOL STUDENTS AND OTHERS

The 'student revolt' of the 1960s in Britain can perhaps be dated from the formation of the Radical Students Alliance in 1966. But it first became visible to the public when, in 1967, student militancy (first manifested in California in 1964) reached Britain. In the spring of that year, students occupied the London School of Economics and, in December, the Regent Street Polytechnic. In February 1968 students held a four-day sit-in at Leicester University, protesting at their lack of representation on University committees. And then, in May 1968, student militancy erupted on many campuses and in many countries, including Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Germany, Ireland, Peru, Spain, USSR and, of course, France. In Britain the event which more than any other captured the imagination of radicals was the occupation of Hornsey College of Art. As the book written by students and staff of the college begins: "This book records the beginning of a revolution." [1]

The radical school students' movement can be seen as a part of this 'student revolt'. On 13 December 1967 students in a number of Paris lycées (secondary schools) had staged a strike. *Comités d'Action Lycéens* (*CAL*s) were formed. Strikes and demonstrations continued into the new year and, by March, 50 out of the 60 Paris lycées had formed action committees [2].

In March 1968 school students staged a strike in Manchester [3]. During that year a Manchester Union of Secondary School Students was formed, followed by the Swansea Union of Progressive Students, the

Bristol Sixth Form Alliance and the Cardiff Union of Secondary Schools. In October 1968 the Free Schools Campaign was formed in London. (This was a campaign for freedom in schools - not a campaign for 'free schools' as the term was later understood, as in 'Scotland Road Free School'). The Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation, set up in the Autumn to replace the Radical Students Alliance, had a school students' section with a considerable membership in some schools (there were 90 members at Camden School for Girls in North London). And in December the Secondary School Students Union, based in North London, was formed.

In January 1969 the Free Schools Campaign (FSC) organised a conference in London which was attended by representatives of these groups, as well as of groups from Oxford, Leeds, Surrey, Hertfordshire and Middlesex, and delegates from the Libertarian Teachers Association, the Labour Party Young Socialists, and from the French Comités d'Action Lycéens. It was a hectic conference, the distractions including an ITV *World In Action* camera crew, a vociferous contingent of Maoists from Regent Street Polytechnic, an invasion by 15 National Front trouble-makers, and an evident police presence. Nevertheless, a seven point programme of demands was agreed upon:

1. Freedom of speech and assembly and the right to organise inside schools; no censorship of school magazines, clubs and societies.
2. Effective democratic control of the school by an elected School Council, subject to instant recall, made up of representatives of students and staff.
3. The abolition of all exams in their present form.
4. The abolition of corporal punishment and all arbitrary forms of punishment, and of the prefect system.
5. A free, non-segregated (by class, race or sex), comprehensive education system.
6. Educational establishments to become local evening centres of educational and cultural activity and discussion.
7. Full maintenance grants to all receiving full-time education over school-leaving age.[4]

This action programme, as it was called, set the agenda (give or take some amendments) for the school students' movement in the coming years.

From that January 1969 conference two strands of the movement emerged. At a critical juncture of the conference Michael Duane had intervened to say "You have to decide whether you want education with a little politics or politics with a little education". This pithily described the difference between the two strands. On the one hand was the Free Schools Campaign, which wanted to be seen as 'apolitical' [5]. What this meant was that the FSC wanted to campaign on issues which immediately concerned school students, making no insistence on any 'correct' political line. On the other hand were those who argued that the school students' movement must have an explicit political analysis. This second strand crystallised into the Schools Action Union (SAU). A proposed umbrella organisation, called 'Unison', was to be convened by the Manchester Union of Secondary School Students. Although one national meeting was called, Unison did not get off the ground, and in effect the two strands went their separate ways.

THE FREE SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN

FSC was a libertarian group in which adult anarchists played leading roles. It focussed on the concerns expressed by its school student members - dictatorial headteachers, bullying teachers, boring lessons, petty rules, outdated attitudes to long hair, and so forth. FSC produced four issues of a duplicated magazine, the *Free Schools Educational Supplement*. Although distinctly messy in appearance, it had the advantage over rival publications in covering questions of real interest to youngsters, written in a language they could understand.

By June 1969 FSC had groups in 16 towns and cities, from Belfast and Bristol to Aberdeen and Tunbridge Wells. The Swansea, Bristol and Reading unions already mentioned were affiliated to the FSC. It would require research at a local level, which I have not undertaken, to ascertain what these 19 groups achieved in terms of recruiting significant numbers of members or mounting significant campaigns. They certainly provided ready copy for local newspapers: headlines like "Anarchy in city schools: Pupils are Demanding Share of Control" or "School Leaflet Campaign By Reds" were typical reactions to attempts by FSC activists to give out leaflets at school gates.

FSC lasted less than a year. Like the Libertarian Teachers Association (see last chapter) it eschewed organisation on principle. Those FSC groups which were at all organised became Schools Action Union branches.

SCHOOLS ACTION UNION

The SAU enjoyed a longer life and, on occasion, proved capable of some degree of organisation. Between 1969 and 1973 SAU produced 13 issues of its newspaper *Vanguard* (although eight of these were produced in 1969 alone). It published five issues of a theoretical journal *Democratic Schools*; held four national conferences; maintained a national committee structure; printed and distributed hundreds of thousands of leaflets; organised several strikes and demonstrations; raised petitions; took part in broadcasts, gave interviews to the media and issued press statements; supported many local single-issue campaigns; and provided a focal point for the school students' movement.

SAU's first venture was a demonstration held in London in March 1969. Some 500 school students handed in a petition to the DES calling for freedom of speech and assembly, co-educational comprehensive schools for all, the out-lawing of corporal punishment, student and staff control of schools, more pay for teachers and the abolition of school uniforms. In June of that year 70 SAU supporters invaded Dulwich College in South London. Taking advantage of this prominent public school's 'open day', the incursors demanded an end to schools for the privileged. In the summer holiday of 1969 SAU organised a 'Living School' at London's Conway Hall.

In September 1969 SAU obtained office space in North Gower Street, Euston, which also housed *Agitprop* - a radical information agency - and the newly founded *Gay News*. Sharing the building with Agitprop meant that members of SAU came into contact with political activists from a variety of left-wing groupings. This helped them to shape their political attitudes, although their most pressing need was for concrete assistance. As Trisha Jaffe, one of the early SAU activists recalls:

> There was a pride in being able to do things, wanting to do things better, wanting to be able to produce things more professionally so that they got across to more people. And we would have used anybody, particularly in the early years, who would help us get skills like that. Most of us abhorred IS at the time, and yet it was people in IS who taught us about layout and paste-up and how to prepare for off-set litho and where to actually go. They never commented on content, but offered that kind of advice and help and back-up...
>
> Because none of the people in Agitprop were connected with any political group, I think we felt less threatened by them and less as if they wanted to take us over. They saw themselves as facilitators for groups in the movement and that's the way we felt them to be.[6]

The fear of being 'taken over' referred to by Jaffe was a very real fear for the fledgling SAU - as it was, indeed, for many small radical groupings. The various Trotskyist groups in particular were constantly attempting to 'win control' of organisations in which they had members. Despite some destructive feuding, SAU was never taken over in this way

although, as we shall see, it did eventually become an exclusively Maoist organisation.

From North Gower Street the London Region of SAU published four issues of a paper called *Rebel*, a well-produced 12-page broadsheet which reported on campaigns in schools and set out SAU's policies. Its closely-typed pages and minimal art-work probably meant that its appeal to the average London school student was limited.

Autumn 1969 was a period of teachers' strikes, and NUT officials were alarmed to find school students, carrying the SAU banner, joining their demonstrations. On 19 December SAU attempted its first London-wide school strike, intended to demand the right to organise and to oppose the victimisation of SAU members which had been taking place. The strike was not successful, and nor was a demonstration called in July 1970. On each occasion less than 100 school students participated and it wasn't until 1972 that SAU again attempted large-scale actions. Energy was put, instead, into local group activity.

By the summer of 1969 there were some 27 SAU branches around the country (in addition to the 19 FSC groups). In numerical terms this was probably the peak of SAU's success. By September 1969 the number of local groups had fallen to 15, and the figure stayed at that level for the next two years. Local groups came and went like shooting stars, their existence usually depending on the enthusiasm of one or two activists, the group collapsing when they ran out of energy, left school, or were ordered to stop by their parents.

In its first years the membership of SAU comprised largely the children of middle-class parents - typically fifth- and sixth-formers

in grammar schools and public schools. In 1971 and 1972, however, the membership became more working class and based on comprehensive schools. This reflected a developing politics which more and more saw the problem of schooling as a class problem, rather than a predicament shared by all school students. Politically, the SAU embraced anarchists, Labour Party Young Socialists, the Young Communist League, supporters of the Militant Group, International Socialists and members of the International Marxist Group. Most SAU members, however, belonged to no group: their politics were forming as they joined SAU. It was clear, however, that as 1969 progressed, SAU was gravitating towards revolutionary politics, a fact observed by the *Times Educational Supplement*:

> The SAU is no longer committed to the original campaign of school reform; led by its London-based groups, it is now working towards the reform of society through revolution.[7]

By 1970 the various political factions in the SAU had begun to fall out and the subsequent history of SAU was marred by internal disputes at the centre, accompanied by dwindling contact with the grass roots. In the summer of 1970 the Gower Street office was lost - a severe organisational blow. (One of SAU's problems was its constantly changing address which made it hard for would-be members to catch up with it). *Rebel* was not produced after the summer of 1970, and *Vanguard* appeared only twice in 1970, twice in 1971 and once - the final issue - in May 1972. It stopped reporting what was happening at a local level; articles became longer, more didactic and less readable. In 1971 all 'Trotskyists, Anarchists, liberals and reformists' were expelled from SAU. The organisation took an 'independent revolutionary line' which was, in fact, the very narrow Maoist line of the core of activists at the centre. In Trisha Jaffe's words:

> The political ideas of that particular group became more sophisticated, developing their ideas and getting further and

> further away from where the majority of school students remained. That majority were dealing with the here-and-now and not with sophisticated political analysis.[8]

In April 1971 membership nationwide was down to 338 (having topped 1,000 at an earlier stage). Six months later it was down to 87, but the leadership considered this to be an improvement since 'the calibre of cadres was higher' [9].

Such real campaigning that SAU undertook was largely the work of local groups which carried on regardless of what was happening at the centre. SAU enjoyed a brief revival in May 1972 when it organised a series of school students' strikes which culminated on 17 May when an estimated 10,000 took part in a remarkable, if chaotic, march through the streets of London, pursued all the way by harassed police. However, enthusiasm died away as quickly as it had arisen, and another strike called for 26 May met with little support. This was in effect the death knell of SAU, although it continued for more than a year, pursuing ideological purity to the last [10].

It would be easy to dismiss the SAU on the grounds that it never achieved mass support amongst school students. Even at its peak it did not involve more than a tiny percentage of school students. This can only partly be explained by the claim that most school students probably never heard of the SAU (or FSC). In fact the media gave considerable coverage to the 'pupil power' movement (as it was constantly dubbed) especially in 1969 and 1972. Whilst it must have been the case that some potential supporters never found out how to get in touch with an SAU group, the experience was that even when a leaflet was thrust into their hands, the great majority expressed little interest.

SAU activists saw this as a problem of 'apathy', and they saw this in turn as an indictment of our schooling system: bourgeois indoctrination was clearly having its effect, since most school students seemed to be complacent, listless, acquiescent. The SAU was probably right to reject the common psycho-biological explanation for this - 'teenagers just aren't interested in politics'. The evidence from France, where the CALs got a massive response from school students, suggested otherwise, as has more recent experience in Southern Africa and the Caribbean where teenagers have played leading roles in extremely courageous campaigns [11].

Frank Musgrove has called the counter-culture a 'revolt of the unoppressed' [12] and we must consider the straightforward possibility that the SAU did not evoke a mass response because most school students were happy with their lot. There is evidence to suggest that significant numbers of young people found the experience of school unpleasant or worse. Edward Blishen's book *The School That I'd Like* catalogues the complaints made by entrants to a competition run by *The Observer* in December 1967. And once established the SAU began to receive unsolicited mail which revealed varying degrees of anguish. It will be worth quoting three examples.

> I am a pupil at X grammar school... At this school there is at present a Maths and Careers Master, namely Mr.Y ... This man uses (extremely frequently) unnecessary violence toward boys for next to nothing, eg slaps about the face and head and occasionally clenched fist punches, this violence is often provoked by the simple asking of a question, hardly a great incentive for boys to ask questions of things they are not sure about. Many Masters witness this intolerable violence but are just too apathetic to take action. As we all know violence is the tool of the ignorant, and violence to this extreme must be illegal somehow, could you advise me on any action to take or even better take action yourself...
>
> *
>
> I am in the sixth form at Z comprehensive school... I am member of the sixth form council, which has been going for six months after polite pressure for such a body. We have organised dances etc. and have taken some part in the formation of policy concerning us.

I am finding as I'm sure you must have discovered apathy. Even if something rather annoying and without a plausible explanation by the powers that be is carried out, so many just shrug it off as something they have to endure. I have many examples of this, perhaps you will give me some hints on how to overcome the problem...

We still have compulsory school uniform for the pupils, except the sixth form. The cane is still used along with the slipper for extreme cases. Many petty rules prevail plus the biggest and often unjust veto used by the headmaster, whose moods and temper can crush any suggested plans put forward.

I have been shown during my years at this school, how one man for his own reasons can wreck all plans at the expense of many people's happiness, for no possible gain on his part except asserting his authority.

I would be very pleased if you could send any information that you can to me, so I can impress upon my colleagues the true aims of your organisation.

In case of misinterpretation I am no Maoist/Leninist, my politics are not in that way inclined, but I do wish to see justice in our schools and this I feel is your major aim.

I applaud your aims and wish you every possible success for the future. I look forward to a reply...

*

At the beginning of the session I wore yellow shorts to PE classes. The gym teacher wasn't very pleased and he told me not to wear them again, but I have worn them to every period of PE since. He has repeatedly told me not to, and I have argued back to him that there is no reason why I shouldn't and that he has nothing to back himself up with and that it is against my principles to conform to a system that I think is wrong, and also that I am an individual. He called me 'awkward'. I said he was being awkward, and we paid a visit to the rector. The rector told me that I should apologise to him for appearing to be impertinent, I told the rector I would not apologise for speaking my mind, and arguing against something that I feel is wrong...

... What should I do? I don't want to give in to this man, and his military beliefs, but what happens if I am threatened with expuslion or something like that, by the rector?...

This session I have not been taking swimming, when I did I used to get bad headaches and a cold. My parents spoke to the PE master and he said that it would be allright if I didn't take swimming from then on. But today...the assistant PE teacher told me that I would now be taking swimming again. I explained to him that I had been allowed to take what the other section of the class took on swimming periods, but he came out with something like "if you don't take swimming, then I will report you to the rector and you will be expelled because PE is compulsory unless you have a doctor's certificate". I doubt I could get a doctor's certificate, especially every three weeks, but I have no intention of taking swimming, because it is bad for my health, and what's more, I loathe it. What can I do?

...Can you help me?

PS I have told the assistant rector that I want to stop taking Religious education, but he tells me that it is a lost cause, even though I am an atheist. What can I do?

PPS I wonder if you could please reply to this as soon as possible, because I get my next swimming period in less than a week, and I would like to know the full situation.

PPPS How much is it to join your union? [13]

The first of these writers was pointing out a breach of the law. There was (and indeed still isn't in 1987) any formal channel through which he could complain about this. The second writer seems to be no hothead: her hope is for no more than a modest measure of justice. The third, on the other hand, is a youngster who some teachers would call 'awkward'; and yet his letter raises valid questions of individual liberty and it is interesting to note that it was to the SAU that he turned for help.

SAU battled continually against great organisational handicaps. Whilst a disproportionate amount of time was spent on political and theoretical debate, the grass-roots work fell on the shoulders of school students who, in the main, lacked organisational skills and resources. Producing a leaflet can be a major task if you don't know how to do it and have no access to equipment. During the year that SAU had the North Gower Street office it offered duplicating facilities to local groups. College students and political groups also helped in this way, and in finding suitable venues for meetings. Money was a constant worry. Without the money for a bus fare or a few postage stamps - let alone the train fare to travel to a national conference - it can be difficult to keep even a minimal organisation together.

Communications within groups, between groups, and from groups to the centre, were always a problem for SAU, but the biggest source of

disorganisation was the high turnover of activists. Someone who became involved whilst in the fourth year at secondary school might leave school at the end of that year (RoSLA was not until 1972); with little contact between school year-groups (unless the activist had a brother or sister in another year) there would often be no-one to take over the SAU reins. Pressure of exam work was another reason why fifth- and sixth-formers often had to drop out of SAU activities.

However, it was from the fifth- and sixth-forms that the majority of SAU activists came; and the fact that fifth- and sixth-forms contain a greater proportion of middle-class youngsters (most 'early leavers' being working class) than the school population as a whole helped to account for the strong middle-class representation in the SAU.

Activists faced constant hostility - from parents, teachers, police and the media, as Liza Dresner, who was at the centre of SAU for several years, remembers:

> Somebody the same age as me, a girl who lived with her Mum and step-father, was involved in the school strike, and her step-father actually beat her up. She ran away that night and ended up at my house in a terrible state. Her parents called the police and the police were saying they were going to take her back even though he'd beaten her up. And yet she still carried on being involved. There was that level of bravery - I can't think of another word for it - it was bravery and determination amongst a lot of people. Another girl I knew very well was involved in the SAU and her parents were incredibly opposed and would try all sorts of things to stop her coming out. Parents have a lot of power in that situation: you don't get pocket money and if they stop your pocket money you don't have any bus fare to get anywhere, so you can't come to meetings or go and meet other people.
>
> I was with this girl and we met her Mum and Dad, and they spat at me. There was that degree of hatred, because they associated me with the SAU, they literally spat at me.
>
> There were parents who were absolutely furious that their kids were involved and yet people kept being involved. And there were endless stories of kids being kept in and not allowed pocket money and we'd get phone calls from people saying so-and-so can't come because they're not allowed out for the next six weeks...[14

It seems that parental hostility was strongest in working-class families, except in those cases where parents themselves were active left-wingers. Many SAU activists were forced to give up their involvement by their parents; others could carry on only clandestinely.

Teachers responded unpredictably. If there was a liberal, willing-to-listen response in some schools, others reacted fiercely to SAU activities. Punishments, including physical assault, could be expected. Some headteachers considered student activism to be an insidious threat and went to great lengths to stamp it out. National attention was focussed on Kingsdale Comprehensive School in South London when the headteacher suspended five pupils who had taken part in the SAU strike in December 1969. They were subsequently expelled by the governors. Other headteachers took a more covert approach. The headmaster of William Ellis School in North London wrote to the tutor for admissions at Warwick University in February 1969:

> I write to you concerning the application for entry in 1969 of M.W. of this school. I find it necessary to add to the comments made on the UCCA entry form concerning his preoccupation with student politics. He is now a committee member of the London Schools Action Group, engaged in the organising of protests and demonstrations concerning School Government, etc. His name appeared in the Times Educational Supplement of 10 January, expressing his intention to embark upon militant action whenever necessary.
>
> I felt it was important that you should be aware of this in making your decision. I would prefer this communication to be treated very confidentially, and should be pleased to receive your comments.[15]

This letter did the trick: Warwick Vice-Chancellor Butterworth wrote "Reject this man" on the letter [16].

Although there was nothing illegal in SAU activity *per se*, police were sometimes involved in discouraging school student activists, although policy seemed to vary from area to area:

> We had a lot of harassment from police. Certainly on demonstrations they seemed to be, I think, particularly heavy. And again I think it was to do with this feeling of fear of children

that adults have sometimes when there are large groups of them...It threatens adults' power quite a lot. And I think that policemen, like any other adults, find that very frightening and don't know how to handle it.

We had lots of problems around the SAU office but whether it was to do with just the SAU being there or Agitprop being there or Gay News being there, is difficult to say; but it was always being raided or police arriving...

After demonstrations or after events we had a lot of police harrassment, with police turning up on people's doorsteps. Just having the police coming round and talking to parents and saying "do you know your son or daughter is doing this?" can be very mind-blowing. Schools often notified the police when things were happening, when you went leafletting or something like that. And they were always there, if you leafletted a school. There was always a uniformed presence which put kids off taking leaflets. Mostly they used to be around and watch. Sometimes they told you to move on - "you're blocking the road" or something. But mostly they'd stand around and look at you, they'd take the leaflet off you and they'd ask you what you were doing there, whether you went to that school. They didn't threaten to arrest me or anything. But it was very intimidating to have them hanging around... Having the police there, the police would actually say to kids coming out of school "Now come on, don't stand there, don't talk to these people, off you go" and so it would actually stop people standing and talking to you. [17]

What possibly marked the generation of schools activists in this period out from earlier and later generations was that they dared to stand up and speak out. Indeed 'dare to struggle' was a slogan adopted by the SAU. But, of course, protest and dissent were fashionable at that time, which perhaps made it a little easier.

Considering all these conditions, the *TES*'s description of the SAU as a "chaotic inchoate union of factions" was perhaps unfair [18]. It is possible to argue that the SAU did remarkably well considering the concrete problems it faced.

THE IDEAS OF THE SAU

Although dubbed a 'pupil power' movement by the press, the SAU never sought this title. Their struggle, they explained [19] was not against teachers, but against the system:

> We are not a pupil power organisation. We stand for working class power. If schools are to serve the people they must be controlled by the people.[20]

The SAU constantly demonstrated that they were not 'anti-teacher' by supporting teachers' pay claims. The fullest statement of the SAU's views was set out in a long document *Revolution in the Schools* which was presented at their national conference in October 1970. It contained an uncomplicated Marxist analysis of the role of schooling in capitalist society, quite similar to the Rank & File analysis as presented in Chanie Rosenberg's pamphlet *Education and Society*. It stressed the function of schools in serving the capitalist economy and socialising and indoctrinating children in bourgeois ideology. For the SAU the school students' movement was part of the general struggle of the working class for socialism:

> What we seek to change in schools are not just some minor superficialities... but the whole concept of what is taught. The concept of capitalist competition with its inherent wastage of manpower, food and natural resources, its inflicted misery and denial of fulfilment, hope and potential to the vast bulk of mankind who are needed as consumer fodder by the state political and economic machine. This is the system which we seek to play our part in sweeping away and replacing with a socialist education that teaches self-reliance and respect, cooperation, production only for need and the liberation of man's desire for freedom, democratic practice, justice and the fulfilment of potential.[21]

Revolution in the Schools contained a lengthy review of new-left Marxist orthodoxy; a statement of the aims, principles and method of organisation and discipline of the SAU; how to build a branch of the SAU; the SAU constitution; and a statement called the 'Schools' Charter' which began:

> The fundamental aim of the Schools Action Union is to challenge the absolute power of the head and to place the day-to-day control of the school under the democratic authority of the school council.

In this respect (and in others) the SAU's policy was similar to that of the Rank & File teachers' group; but there was never an active relationship between SAU and Rank & File. This was, I think, a matter of sectarian allegiances rather than one of fundamental differences of

analysis. (However, after the October 1970 conference of the SAU its central core of activists became steadily more convinced that Maoism was the correct political path. This put them at irredeemable loggerheads with the rest of the new left - Maoists, amongst other things, did not condemn Stalinism.)

In June 1970 the SAU put forward a five-point 'Civil Rights Programme' which called for (1) the right to publish uncensored magazines, (2) the right to organise meetings on school premises, (3) the right to join school students unions, and the right to strike, (4) a committee of staff and students to decide punishments, and (5) control of schools to be in the hands of an elected council of staff and students [22]. As we shall see later in the chapter, several of these points were also being proposed at that time by the National Council of Civil Liberties.

It became a central tenet of the SAU that the reforms of schooling which they called for could not be achieved in any other than a socialist society. They saw the oppression of school students in school as a facet of capitalism, just as there were those who regarded the oppression of women, and racism, in the same light. But in fact many of the SAU's demands were for straightforward reforms which found widespread support amongst liberals: the abolition of physical punishment, reform of examinations, the abolition of school uniform etc. These are nothing more than policies which had been advocated by progressive educationists for many years. Even the SAU's most radical demand - democratic control of schools - became a *fait accompli* in Finland in 1971 (where corporal punishment had been abolished in 1914 and there has never been school uniform)[23].

Other SAU demands - for freedom of speech, freedom of publication (of students' magazines and leaflets) and freedom to meet and organise collectively - did perhaps seem deeply threatening to the established power structure. The fear, even perhaps in the heart of progressive teachers, was possibly that things would 'get out of control'. And yet, if leading SAU activists had had their way, things would have been very far from getting out of control. After the initial flirtation with libertarianism, the SAU's organisation was rigidly controlled. There were many calls in the theoretical journal *Democratic Schools* for greater discipline. As it was expressed in *Rebel*:

> In order not to play into the hands of reactionary school authorities, the revolutionaries must make their own position clear - that we do not stand for 'free for all' individual freedom, with no sense of responsibility, but we fight for a politically conscious movement with a high sense of discipline realised through democratic discussion and decision.[24]

Whether SAU would have been *capable* of controlling the mass movement it sought to mobilise is, however, another question.

Like Rank & File, the SAU did not challenge the fundamental assumptions about education which some sections of the radical movement were by now questioning. They continued to see education as a matter of teachers giving lessons in classrooms, and they did not address the curriculum issue at all. This was a paradox because arguably the greatest success of the SAU, and the other organisations of the school students' movement, was the learning it provided for the youngsters who were actually involved in it. As Liza Dresner observes:

> It taught me a lot. It gave me a lot more confidence. It taught me more than I was learning at school in terms of official teaching. There were lots of things I had feelings about anyway, like injustice and unfairness... it gave me a context to put it in. The more I got involved, the more I understood where everything fitted in really and why things were so unfair. Also it gave me confidence to begin expressing things. Instead of thinking I was just 'thick', I began to have some faith in my own views... What I learned from SAU was completely the opposite to what I think they wanted to teach at school. I think everybody learnt a lot. A lot of people would have come to the SAU with certain views already, but perhaps in a

very vague way, and I think everybody who got involved in the SAU came out with these views clearer and in something of a context. [25]

ADULT MANIPULATION?

A view often expressed by the local and national press, and by some teachers, was that the school students' movement was created by adult agitators bent on stirring up trouble in schools [26]. In this view the adult agitators would recruit a handful of disaffected school children to give some credence to the pretence that it was a schools students' campaign.

Undoubtedly there were some local groups which matched this picture. In one case a group of anarchists from an art college duplicated some leaflets and handed them out at the gates of the local grammar school. In this way they made contact with a few fifth- and sixth-formers who were interested in political activity. They also gained the covert support of one or two young teachers. The group failed, however, to get any response from the great majority of school students. In the face of this obstinate 'apathy' the group turned its attention to some other form of political action.

But as a description of the school students' movement in general, this is quite inadequate. It starts from the premiss that there was no 'real' dissatisfaction amongst school students about their schooling; and it goes on to assume that even if there was, school students would not want to do anything about it unless they were stirred up by adult agitators. Liza Dresner again:

The charge that kids were manipulated by adults makes me very cross... I think that is an absolutely typical thing adults say; I mean, it's like school kids can't think for themselves...I don't believe *I* was manipulated by adults. I think I had a brain, could

think for myself... I think I was very aware when people tried to manipulate. People manipulate all the time and I think people are aware of it...

Obviously there were adults involved. But it is an incredible insult to say to me personally that I didn't have the capability of knowing when things were unfair to myself and trying to take action to do something about it, and also that I couldn't see that people may want to manipulate my commitment, or involvement, and be aware of that and able to handle that.

There were lots of things going on - 1968 and all that - and everybody was talking about it, and school kids were talking about it. They didn't need adults to manipulate them into saying 'this is unfair - its unfair for people to be beaten with a stick', or 'its unfair that rules and regulations are brought in that we have no say over and no control over and that affect our lives and make us feel uncomfortable.' And then going on from that to say 'it's unfair that at 11 we're divided up into those that are going to be seen as thick for the rest of their lives, and those that are going to have chances and opportunities to go on to university and earn a lot more'... Those things are as unfair to children as they are to adults. As soon as you become aware of it you know they're unfair and therefore you do something about it. It doesn't take adults to manipulate that.[27]

Nor does Trisha Jaffe recollect adult manipulation:

I don't remember the involvement of adults in a manipulative way. What we are talking about is people who had recently left school and gone into colleges who saw themselves still as having their interests based in the school student movement. They felt themselves still to be, in a sense, a part of it, having gone through 7, 8, 9 years of that situation; and their politics overlapped into the school student movement as well. Although there were some groups that clearly saw the SAU as a means of recruiting to themselves, or a means of developing various political strands... it was school students doing the work, it was school students doing the recruiting, it was school students doing the theory. It was school students in a wider context, learning and bouncing ideas from other people, but nobody was doing it for us or offering it to us on a plate, saying 'this is the way we do it'.[28]

It is not, of course, unusual for young people to seek adult help for their projects. The distinction between adults encouraging youngsters in religious activities, say, or military activities, and adults encouraging youngsters in school student unions is that the first two are officially sanctioned and the third is not. There were some teachers who saw it as a legitimate part of their role as teachers to give help to school student activists. But in the main, the adult involvement comprised university and college students who were able to

offer duplicating facilties and meeting spaces for school students' groups, and who were young enough to feel that the interests of school students were also *their* interests.

ASSESSING THE SAU

The SAU (and the FSC) created a model of how school students could be an active collective force seeking to influence the shape of their education. Although not entirely without precedent, it was, in 1969, innovative in four respects. First, it added a new dimension to the emphasis of that time on children as *actors* in the world. Writers like John Holt and Herbert Kohl in America, and Keith Paton and Douglas Holly in Britain, were pointing out that orthodox practice treated children as material to be worked upon by teachers. Schools like Summerhill and Prestolee had pioneered a more active role for students. But these (with the possible exception of Summerhill) tended to stress the active role of the student in their relationship to the subject matter of learning. The school students' movement went beyond this, raising broader questions of power and control and the organisation of the schooling process.

Second, the SAU proposed collective action. From its earliest days, the SAU formed the view that polite representations to headteachers were unlikely to achieve their aims. They believed they would have to fight for their demands, and that only an organised union could defend activists from victimisation.

This contrasts with Summerhill, or Prestolee, or the classrooms envisaged by Holt or Kohl, where an enlightened teacher enabled the

student to take an active role. No role was envisioned for a school students' union.

The third innovation of the SAU was its overt association of the reform of schooling with politics. School pupils had gone on strike before [29] but had never generalised their specific demands in a political analysis. The SAU didn't just campaign for school students' everyday rights: they supported teachers' pay claims, took an active part in (for example) the 1969 Haringey 'banding' dispute and in the campaign in Barnet for comprehensive schooling. The SAU wanted to go beyond tackling single issues like corporal punishment. They saw campaigns on single issues like uniform or the right of boys to wear long hair "as levers to mobilise school students and not, as the NUS sees them, the limits of our struggle" [30]. This political generalisation was, as I suggested in chapter 1, a feature of the radicals of this period. The SAU went from making specific complaints about schools to formulating a general critique of schooling and then a general critique of society.

Fourth, the SAU not only expressed their criticisms of schooling openly and defiantly, but with a clear sense of entitlement to be doing so. They insisted on students' rights to make demands. No longer was it going to be a matter of progressive teachers inviting students to express their views: from now on, students were going to take the initiative and put their views forward - whether or not they were invited to.

The 1960s and early 1970s was a period of liberalisation in many schools. Although few schools would want to be thought of as 'giving in' to SAU demands, the campaigns of the school students' movement gave

added weight to the existing tendency to relax uniform requirements, phase out the cane, allow greater scope for student expression and establish school councils. Most notably, schools tended to make life more comfortable for sixth-formers. It was, indeed, in teachers' interests to do so, since more sixth-formers meant more scale posts for teachers. Schools had to compete increasingly for the over-16s with Further Education colleges which were considered to be more willing to treat these young people as adults. However, the liberalisation of regimes for sixth-formers was not all good news for the school students' movement: if the sixth-formers were the ones most capable of organisation and leadership, the granting of concessions to them could undermine their keenness to campaign for the interests of younger students.

Trisha Jaffe is in no doubt that the SAU has had long term effects:

> Like a lot of other movements, the effects have been much greater than the numbers involved would have led one to believe. I think ripples have gone through. I think you can see that in things like the ILEA's policies on the establishment of schools councils and democratic forums... and in curricular changes and the way in which the curriculum itself is now viewed; and in pupil participation in learning. I don't think it is accidental that progressive education now actually sees pupil participation as being essential... I think those effects have knocked on through, as well as 'cosmetic' effects like school uniform, like the fact that the prefect system exists in very few schools today.[31]

This may be a sustainable viewpoint, although it would be a difficult matter to collect evidence to support it. This is a general problem in evaluating the effects, if any, of the radical movement. Although it is easy to show how the movement had an impact on the climate of thought at the time, it is not easy to pinpoint tangible reforms and say with any confidence that these came about because of the pressures brought to bear by the radicals. It is just as likely that both were a product of the same 'zeitgeist'.

Those who do not share the Maoist politics of the SAU's central core will find it hard to resist the reflection that those politics hindered, to say the least, the building of a mass organisation which could campaign effectively for the interests of school students. To put these interests first, and politics second, was the reason for the formation of the second major school students' union, the National Union of School Students.

NATIONAL UNION OF SCHOOL STUDENTS

In March 1969 the National Union of Students (NUS), conscious of the growing school students' movement, launched a recruiting drive amongst sixth-formers. Although proposing to represent their interests to school authorities, the NUS's chief 'selling point' was the offer of cheap travel facilities to a targeted market of 25,000 sixth-formers. The NUS's Sixth-Form Campaign became, however, an embarrassment to the union and by the end of 1969 it was quietly dropped.

In 1972 the NUS again turned its attention to schools, agreeing to support the establishment of a National Union of School Students (NUSS). A number of school activists, by now disillusioned with the political direction of the SAU, were ready to take advantage of the opportunity. Holding its first conference in May 1972 - attended by some 200 school students - it adopted a series of policies which were amended later in the year into a 27-point programme. Many of these points were also policies of the SAU - for comprehensive, co-educational, schools; for democratic control of schools; against compulsory religion; for the abolition of physical punishment; for a school committee to handle disciplinary matters; more pay for teachers;

for the opening up of school facilities to the community; for the replacement of examinations; for a wage for students over 16; for freedom of speech and assembly and the right to produce uncensored literature; against uniforms; for freedom of movement during breaks and lunch times. But the NUSS added a number of further points to make their programme into a comprehensive package for the reform of schooling.

It was significant that the NUSS held its founding conference in the middle of the London school students' strikes of May 1972. The NUSS distanced itself from the SAU, hoping to project a more acceptable, 'moderate' image. It saw its aims as being achieved by a long-term process of pressure-group campaigning and by negotiation, rather than by militant action. It also distanced itself from the Rank & File teachers' group, fearing that too close an association would damn it in the eyes of the National Union of Teachers, with whom the NUSS were keen to establish cordial relations. In the event, however, the NUT steadfastly rejected the NUSS's overtures and never agreed to recognise the NUSS's existence. Communist Party and Labour Party left-wingers on the NUT executive were wholly in agreement with this stance.

Support from the NUS gave the NUSS organisational facilities which had been undreamt of by the SAU (and indeed most other radical groupings). As well as providing the NUSS with (rather humble) office facilities, the NUS paid a full-time salary to the NUSS president and provided printing and duplicating resources. Despite its considerable financial contribution, the NUS allowed the NUSS autonomy right through until 1979 when control of the NUSS fell into the hands of a combined Socialist Workers Party [32]/International Marxist Group caucus, at which point the NUS decided to call a halt.

The NUSS's organisational resources allowed it to build up strong branches in some areas, and at one stage the union had a paper membership of around 15,000 - very much more than the SAU ever had. By the mid-1970s some teachers were able to countenance the idea of a school students' union without panic, and indeed in a few schools the headteacher acknowledged the NUSS as a legitimate negotiating body representing the interests of pupils. Nonetheless, the overall climate remained one of hostility from parents, teachers, authorities and police. The problems which thwarted the development of the SAU were experienced by the NUSS in hardly less sharp form; the collapse of school branches when the prime movers left school; difficulty in finding venues for meetings; shortage of money for travel and local activities; parental opposition; and organisational inexperience. Internal political disputes were a bug-bear for the NUSS too, although until 1979 they were not as debilitating for the NUSS as they had been for the SAU.

It was not until 1978 that the NUSS launched a magazine. This was *BLOT*, financed by a grant of £1,600 from the Gulbenkian Foundation. It had a circulation of some 10,000 copies. With a cheerful appearance and punchy style, which contrasted with the SAU's *Vanguard* and *Rebel*, it was received with outrage by some sections of the national press, particularly the third issue (1979) which mentioned masturbation.

Once the NUS withdrew its support, the NUSS quickly withered away, which demonstrates how important finance is for an organisation of this type. And yet we might point to a discrepancy between, on the one hand, the financial problems of schools students' unions whose members sometimes 'couldn't raise the bus fare' and, on the other hand, the well-known increase in teenage spending power in the 1960s and 1970s.

One might hypothesise that the school students who were interested in students' unions were not the ones who had money in their pockets; but one could equally hypothesise that records and clothes (and the other big areas of the youth market) were a higher priority for youngsters than contributions to unions. Both student unions, and clothes and records, offer a sense of identity to young people, although of very different kinds. But clothes and records were socially approved whilst student unions were not, so the claims of each on teenage pockets were unequal.

Like other radical organisations which operated in the mid-1970s, the NUSS found that the social forces which gave rise to it, which we might summarise as the cultural upheaval of the 1960s, were dissipating even as it was founded. This is not to say that the reforms which the NUSS sought became any the less necessary, but that there was no longer a climate which encouraged talk of radical reform. The tide of social conservatism which has become so apparent in the 1980s was already coming in.

OTHER SCHOOL STUDENTS' GROUPS

It would be an incomplete account of the school students' movement which recorded only the major national organisations. In addition to the FSC, SAU and NUSS, groupings of radical-minded students came together in schools and towns and cities all over the country. Very often their focus was the production of a magazine written by, and addressed to, school students. Examples were *Ashes and Grapes* (Cardiff), *Brain Damage* (Oxford), *Compulsory Miseducation* (Manchester), *Enigma* (Portsmouth), *Fang* (Yorkshire), *Hackney Miscarriage* (East London), *HOD* (Leeds), *Kids Review* (West London), *Kraken* (Islington,

North London), *Little Digger* (Brighton), *Pigeon* (Slough), *Rustle* (Essex), *SAM* (Plymouth) and *Troll* (Canterbury). These were not school magazines mixing reports on football matches with jokes about teachers. They were overtly radical, with the characteristics of radicalism I described in chapter 1. At various times political sects also produced magazines for school students, such as the Young Communist League's *Format* (1969) and the Socialist Workers Party's *Rebel* (late 1970s).

A good example of an independent school students' magazine was *Y-Front*, four issues of which appeared in London in 1972 and 1973. Anarchic in both form and content - like the early issues of *Oz*, it was often hard to read the print - it had humour and imagination which the more political magazines lacked. Characteristically for the period it made much use of *Beano* cartoons for graphics. *Y-Front* did not attempt to present its readers with any systematic analysis; taking a cheerful anti-authoritarian stance, its primary purpose was to entertain its readers. Many of its pages were given over to an 'alternative music course' - a potted teach-yourself guide for budding rock musicians.

Like the other magazines, *Y-Front* did not last very long. They were produced because their creators enjoyed producing them (as evidenced by the heavy self-indulgence which was their hall-mark). Once production became a chore, it was dropped. *Y-Front* printed 2,000 copies of its final two (litho-printed) issues, and had extensive contacts with similar ventures around the country. It published lists of other groups, recommended books and pamphlets, carried news about free schools, making it clear that it was consciously part of a movement.

In concluding this survey of the school students' movement, I want to make one point which, although simple, is important. When children and

young people protest about their conditions, they are protesting about conditions which are, for them, only temporary. Women will always be women, black people will always be black: their struggle against their conditions of oppression is a life-long struggle. So, in all probablility, is the struggle of the poor against poverty. But school students, like prisoners, are eventually 'let out', and although they may continue to sympathise emotionally and intellectually with those who remain behind, they no longer materially experience the oppression as they once did. Their concrete basis for involvement in a continuing campaign is therefore removed. Just when young people reach an age when they are able to articulate demands and start to organise to achieve them, just at this point, they cease to be school students. It is for this reason that it is extremely difficult for school students' to mount an impressive and sustained national campaign. Their only way out of this difficulty - to seek the active assistance of older people - calls forth immediate charges of 'adult manipulation'.

The absence of a sustained and impressive national campaign may too easily be taken to indicate that school students are satisfied with their lot. But it is more and more acknowledged in contemporary society that special-interest groups must somehow organise public campaigns if their needs are to be recognised - hence the multiplication of pressure-groups of all sorts over the past 30 years. Few of these pressure groups suffer the kind of overt hostility and repression which the school students' movement experienced.

There is therefore, I suggest, a particular moral onus on adults to examine critically how they treat children and young people. It was to take up this moral onus that the Childrens Rights movement emerged in the 1960s.

> I'll tell you what I think. I think that since t'war they've played up this children job too much and t'children's taken advantage of it. I were brought up wi't'boot and t'fist in my young days, but nowadays you can't touch 'em.[33]

There was a post-war current of liberalisation in attitudes to children, exemplified notably by the writings of Benjamin Spock whose influential *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* was first published in the USA in 1946. Spock's advice to parents was similar to that of A.S.Neill, although it took Spock to make Neill conscious of the significance of the child's earliest years [34].

In the late 1960s this current crystallised into a lobby for the rights of children. In 1967 the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) published a duplicated book *The Rights of Children and Young Persons*, prepared by Nan Berger. The central propositions were that children were being denied human rights which are taken for granted by adults in our society, and that the place where these rights were most comprehensively denied was the school.

In 1970 and 1971 the NCCL published a series of six broadsheets under the heading *Children Have Rights*. The first of these was concerned with children in schools. It argued for modification of the *in loco parentis* concept, for the establishment of advisory school councils, for the abolition of corporal punishment, for the right of children to organise themselves in school unions, for uncensored magazines, against compulsory religion, for freedom of personal appearance and clothing, for freedom from discrimination, and for the right to a good education. These were, of course, similar to the demands made by the school students unions; but the NCCL was arguing not for revolution but for

reforms in the law. The publication of the six broadsheets culminated in an NCCL Conference on Children's Rights in October 1971.

A rather different approach came from the book *Childrens Rights* published in 1971 [35]. In this book Nan Berger quoted words ascribed to William Morris "Children have as much need for a revolution as the proletariat have" [36]. Although the book endorsed the law reform strategy of the NCCL, it was more concerned with the broader place of children in society. A central concern was the repression of children's sexuality: the psychological authority to whom all the contributors referred was Wilhelm Reich, and the practical ideal the supposed customs of the Trobriand Islanders [37].

The book was something more than a plea for the rights of children: it was also a manifesto for an alternative revolutionary outlook, and in this sense it brought a new dimension to the radical movement. Instead of the Marxist view that class is at the root of social problems, it argued that sex repression and patriarchy were a deeper source of evil:

> The sickness inducted into the child is that of our society: anti-sex, anti-life, the giving of greater importance to power and money than to love... The importance of the rights of children is that by recognising them we will break the chain of continuity.[38]

The question of child and teenage sexuality touches some of the rawest nerves in our social psychology. Any suggestion that young people have, or would like to have, an active sexuality, under conditions of their own choosing, seems to raise public hackles. And there was plenty to raise public hackles (and the salacious rage of Fleet Street) at this time: in 1971 both the editors of *Oz* and the publishers of the *Little Red School Book* were on trial on charges of corrupting the morals of minors. And there was something of a furore in

the same year over Dr. Martin Cole's sex education film *Growing Up* which showed people masturbating [39].

The contributors to the *Children's Rights* book, joined by John Holt and, by chance, one of the contributors to *Oz* 28, launched a new magazine called *Children's Rights* in December 1971. The title was a little misleading since the magazine covered many of the interests of the radical movement. Early issues dealt with, for example, racism in schools, deschooling, truancy and vandalism, an 'action guide for kids', reviews of children's sex education books, the Scotland Road Free School, a student's experience of teaching practice, the politics of pre-school provision, 'pupil power', the Schools Action Union, Summerhill, and Kirkdale School.

From the outset the magazine's purposes seemed unclear. On the one hand was the sexual liberation theme:

> All the people involved in *Children's Rights*, book or magazine, will carry on the Freudian and Reichian formulation by stating that the integration of sexuality in the life of persons of any age is one of the major objects of our fight for the rights of children.[40]

Alongside this was an interest in deschooling and freeschooling. At the same time, there was an apparent attempt to win a readership amongst school students. And then again the third issue, which dealt with child-birth, seemed to be addressed primarily to parents and parents-to-be. In amongst this mixture was some anarchism with a hard edge. In the first issue a brief 'Children's Angry Brigade Communique' asserted:

> We are tired of being a repressed generation. Our generation is repressed by censorship laws, age regulations, schools (prisons?), and sadly our own parents. No longer shall we accept this repression. We are angry. The only hope for a future society lies in us... The reprinting of an uncensored 'Litte Red School Book' for free distribution was our first act. We shall not limit ourselves to non-violent acts if the school situation persists... All sabotage is effective in hierarchical systems like schools - unscrew locks,

> smash tannoys, paint blackboards red, grind all the chalk to dust - you're angry - you know what to do.[41]

This upset several of the magazine's backers, but more was to come. The fifth issue (May 1972), alongside articles by John Holt and Michael Duane attacking examinations and testing, and an account of the hidden curriculum by Ian Lister (shortly to become Professor of Education at York University) was 'Children's Bust Book Part 1', intended as a guide to young people on what to do if they got into trouble with the law. In amongst some fairly standard legal advice were comments like "The first indication of an arrest is when a copper has got hold of you. What happens next depends upon your speed, strength and fighting spirit."[42]. This upset the magazine's backers even more. Holt resigned from the editorial advisory board; so did Neill, although it caused him anguish to do so [43]. The advisory board sacked editor Julian Hall; the name of the magazine was changed to *Kids*, and the format altered. However, the magazine, even though claiming a circulation of 10,000, still didn't find an identity and it ceased publication after the seventh issue in 1972.

The problem of *Children's Rights* was one shared by many radical educational publications: to whom should they address themselves? Those who believe that teachers are in a position to implement radical reforms can address themselves to teachers. And those who believe that children can win their liberation by their own action can address themselves to school students. But between these and the direct political lobbying of local and national government is a yawning chasm. In this chasm are all the people who deal with children (which means most people) whether as parents, relatives, friends, neighbours or in their working capacity. Radical books or magazines which sell 5,000 or even 10,000 copies clearly aren't reaching this great mass of people.

Although the occasional book will achieve a mass circulation - Dr. Spock is an example - even those reach only a minority of the population.

Radicals had no clear answer to this problem. Putting their faith in the proverb 'from little acorns great oaks do grow', they published their ideas in a small way hoping that they would, somehow, 'catch on'. But not all little acorns grow into great oaks, and the radical movement could have done with clearer hypotheses about how public consciousness may be changed. *Childrens Rights* was unique amongst radical education magazines in trying to address itself to the generality of people - but this was its downfall: in the jargon of the publishing world, it failed to 'locate its readership'. Looked at another way (and I shall turn to this again in chapter 9) it did not identify a 'power base' on which it could build.

The most extreme statement of the children's rights position came in John Holt's book *Escape from Childhood* in which he argued that children, however young, should have all the same rights and responsibilities as adults - to vote, to choose their place of domicile, to own property, to enter into contracts, to drive a car if they can pass the test. Whatever the merits of Holt's case - and I will not discuss them here - it cannot be said that it received public acceptance.

CHILDRENS RIGHTS WORKSHOP

Out of the ashes of *Children's Rights* magazine, the Childrens Rights Workshop (CRW) was established in London in February 1973. Its founding statement said:

> The Childrens Rights Workshop was set up to reaffirm the fundamental fact that children are people. Children are not automatically 'underdeveloped', 'immature', 'incapable', 'irresponsible' or 'ignorant'. Children have rights - the same rights as those supposedly enjoyed by adults today. Children have the right to fight for those rights. Furthermore, children have the right to fight for those other basic human and social rights that are generally denied in modern society... the Childrens Rights Workshop is part of the growing network of people and groups working with and for children and committed to radical social change and Socialist principles of organisation.[44]

The workshop offered an advice and information service, handling the substantial quantity of mail which the magazine had engendered, and acted as a pressure group for legal and social change. CRW became one of the focal points for the freeschooling and deschooling movements in England. It also supported the growing number of parents who were thinking of educating their children at home (see page 168).

CRW's most successful project was its analysis of children's books. In August 1974 it published a statement about this together with a list of books which were recommended as "useful, because in some way they escape from the narrow and distorted view of the world found in most children's books". CRW was not, in fact, the first in this field. A Children's Books Study Group had been formed in London in Autumn 1971; with a feminist orientation, it developed into the Campaign to Impede Sex Stereotyping in the Young (CISSY). In March 1974 a pamphlet was published - *CISSY Talks to Publishers* - which generated a good deal of public debate.

CISSY's initiative, taken up by CRW, in launching a thoroughgoing review of children's books was important because it was one of the few projects of the radical movement which gained momentum after 1976 and went on to make a significant nationwide impact. The CRW children's books project eventually developed into a periodical *The Childrens Book*

Bulletin which reviewed new children's books and became influential - at least in progressive circles. It also helped to generate a useful literature on the matter, beginning with Bob Dixon's two-volume *Catching Them Young*, published in 1977. In the long run an increasing number of schools and libraries reviewed their stocks of books, weeding out the worst of the racism and sexism and other prejudices; and many publishers were encouraged to take a more critical look at their lists.

The connection between this project, and the earlier conception of 'children's rights' was a little tenuous. It illustrates, perhaps, the difficulty of the *concept* of children's rights [45] which easily - if not unavoidably - becomes a matter of adults adjudging what is good for children and what is bad for them. (To contend, for example, that corporal punishment is bad for children is no less judgemental than to contend it's good for them). There was a *prima facie* conflict between the CRW's campaign against sexism and racism in children's books and the school students' campaign against censorship. This was not lost on the right-wing press who held up the critical review of children's books to some fairly predictable ridicule.

In common with many other radical projects in this period (and, we may suppose, in any other period) the CRW eventually foundered in a sea of too much work being attempted by too few people with inadequate resources. If CRW had been launched in the golden years of GLC funding, ten years later, things might have turned out differently.

The pursuit of rights for children has continued, largely in the form of pressure group lobbying - by, for example, the Children's Legal Centre - for reform of the law. Although some progress has been made,

much remains, in the view of those who champion the cause, to be done [46].

OTHER RADICAL GROUPS

In the last chapter I surveyed radical teachers' groups, and in this chapter I have looked at the school students' movement and the childrens rights lobby. There remain to be considered a number of other radical groupings which did not fit into these categories.

SCHOOL WITHOUT WALLS

The School Without Walls (SWW) described itself in this way:

> We are a small group of people (including teachers, architects, librarians, a film-maker etc. as well as parents) who have been meeting irregularly since 1967 to concentrate on our belief in "education as a life-long process in which children and adults are inter-dependent". In our 1969 Pulborough statement, we said that we "no longer believe that the schooling system is the most appropriate way of educating children", and although this statement is now ripe for review, our basic position remains the same. Since 1970 we have attempted to provide a meeting point for new educational experiments, particularly those that go beyond the classroom and aim to draw on the untapped resources of the general environment, local people and facilities. Apart from the SWW Mobile Learning Bus which was much used by local community groups as well as schools, SWW provided a mobile exhibition for conferences, exhibitions, a register of experimental/alternative education projects and resources, and regular meetings which publicised these experiments and provided a forum for further discussion.[47]

SWW was initially established as a working party of the New Education Fellowship (or the World Education Fellowship as it was renamed in 1965), the long-standing progressive education grouping which had published *The New Era* since 1921. As we can see, SWW were examining the possibilities of 'deschooling' before Ivan Illich coined that term in 1971 and popularised the idea. As its names suggests, SWW wanted to promote learning outside of educational institutions. Its 'Learning

Bus', obtained in 1972, has been imitated in a number of areas. SWW also promoted learning exchanges which were an alternative favoured by deschoolers. It supported a project which examined how the press treated educational questions [48]. And in 1974 it produced a pack *Learning Not Schooling* which was a fairly comprehensive catalogue of the radical education movement in England: it listed organisations, magazines, pamphlets, books, free schools, films, resources for learning and provided other information. Updated twice, the pack is, now, a useful historical document.

SWW also submitted evidence to the Taylor Committee on the Government and Management of Schools [49]. This was a rare example of a radical grouping participating in such official consultations.

In 1976 SWW folded, for the usual reason: the people involved had too many other commitments and they could not find 'new blood' to take on the work load. Some members of SWW went on to establish the Corner House Bookshop in London's Covent Garden which specialised in radical education and continued the function of SWW. (It closed in 1983).

BOOTSTRAP UNION

The most intriguing thing about the Bootstrap Union, which published the *Bootstrapper's Charter* in 1974, was its name. Its founder Peter Norwood said:

> The Bootstrap Union works to bring working class parents and teachers together in campaigns, using whatever means are needed to get something *done* about urban schools. Schools must be made to fit the children. They must be democratised to bring in parents, to respond to their wishes... Teachers and parents at the coal-face must take upon themselves the job of reform.[50]

The Bootstrap Union saw itself as becoming a working class equivalent of the Confederation for the Advancement of State Education (CASE). Started by one man, it did not have the resources to bring itself to the attention of many people, and its supposition that working class parents would want to be involved in a mass campaign for the radical reform of city schooling was never put to the test.

CAMPAIGN ON RACISM, IQ AND THE CLASS SOCIETY

The Campaign on Racism, IQ and the Class Society (CRIQCS) was established in 1974 to campaign on the specific issue of intelligence. There had been a long-running effort, since the 1950s, spear-headed by Brian Simon, to demolish the idea of intelligence as a fixed attribute [51]. It was to the credit of Simon and others that by the 1960s their campaign was bearing fruit, and doubts were growing in the minds of educational administrators and policy makers about the validity of intelligence testing. But their success was only partial. Many teachers still believed in fixed intelligence; the majority of educational psychologists believed in and used IQ tests; many local authorities were reluctant to abolish secondary school selection based on 'intelligence' until forced to do so (by the 1976 Education Act); and belief in IQ remained potent in the public mind, as evidenced by the continuing popularity of books like Hans Eysenck's *Check Your Own IQ.*

A revival of academic support for the IQ concept in the late 1960s and early 1970s [52] coincided with an increase in violent racism on the streets of Britain. CRIQCS argued that this racism was underpinned by the 'scientific' notion of IQ which claimed to demonstrate the 'innate superiority' of white Anglo-Saxon peoples over almost everybody else, especially blacks and Irish. As if to prove the point, the first

major conference held by CRIQCS, in London in March 1974, was invaded by a group of youthful National Front members who chanted "long live the pure Anglo-Saxon race" before being ejected.

CRIQCS was also concerned to draw a link between the belief that blacks are 'genetically inferior' and the argument that working class children do badly at school because of their low average innate ability - a view which had been given a thorough airing in the *Black Papers*.

The approach which CRIQCS took may be described as a public information campaign: it published a series of leaflets and argument sheets which succinctly covered the main issues. It also reprinted an American Progressive Labour Party pamphlet *Racism, IQ and Class Society* which dealt with the issue from historical and political as well as scientific angles.

This 'public information' approach taken by CRIQCS marks it out as rather different from the other radical groupings we have been considering. First, it was a single issue campaign (like STOPP). Rather than seeking to make general assertions about education, it concentrated on one question. Second, it was confident that on this question it could marshall the facts to substantiate its case. Thirdly, it could make an appeal to the public (although it focussed its attention on teachers and others in the education service) without requiring from them a prior commitment to, or at least inclination towards, radical politics. However, the tagging of 'Class Society' onto its title indicates that CRIQCS couldn't quite resist the radical propensity for generalisation. But the core of its case against IQ rested on scientific grounds; there was an implicit belief that a wide spectrum of people would accept firmly-based scientific evidence

regardless of their political sympathies. Firmly-based scientific evidence was not, in general, available for most radical propositions about education.

In producing argument sheets and speakers' notes, CRIQCS clearly had a long-term programme in mind. This too differentiated it from much of the radical movement which, as I pointed out in chapter 1, was characteristically in a hurry.

CRIQCS organised a series of demonstrations outside the venues where its chief adversaries - notably Hans Eysenck and Arthur Jensen - were due to speak [53]. Such demonstrations annoyed some academics - not to mention Fleet Street editors - who saw them as 'bully-boy' tactics which disrupted the process of legitimate scientific discourse. Defenders of CRIQCS replied by querying just how far this particular discourse *was* scientific and asking how far scientists may be permitted to detach themselves from the social consequences of their work [54]. In fact, CRIQCS shared the London premises of the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science which had the aim of raising just that question.

CRIQCS succeeded in putting the question of IQ high on the agenda for radical educationists. But its efforts to achieve a shift in public opinion ended when, after little more than a year of activity, CRIQCS ceased to function.

THE A.S.NEILL TRUST

The A.S.Neill Trust was founded in January 1974, defining its objectives as:

> To promote the freedom of children, irrespective of age, race, colour, creed or sex, to live as they choose, subject only to the right of others to similar freedom.
> To provide help and advice (legal or other), training, encouragement and finance to individuals, groups or organisations whose work and aims seek to foster freedom for children.
> To seek to persuade people in other countries to work towards these ends and to co-operate with them.
> To launch appeals for funds as and when necessary and to administer those funds through Trustees appointed for the purpose.

Neill had died in September of the previous year, and it was to commemorate his work and ideas that the Trust was formed. Over the next few years the Trust held a number of conferences, published a Newsletter, and sought to raise funds for disbursal to projects which shared the objectives of the Trust [55]. However, the Trust was not successful in raising substantial sums of money. There was a tension within the Trust, characterised by one participant as being between 'hippies' and 'straights' [56]. The 'hippies' tended to preponderate, but they were not good at fund-raising.

In the five or six years from 1974, the A.S.Neill Trust and its newsletter served mainly as a means of communication between people involved in free schooling and similar projects. It is unlikely, however, that this was the chief interest of the Trust's 400 or so members who (judging by the variety of well-known names on the membership list) would have seen the implications of Neill's life and work extending far beyond free schooling.

EDUCATION OTHERWISE

In the early 1970s opponents of compulsory schooling began to take note of section 36 of the 1944 Education Act:

> It shall be the duty of the parent of every child of compulsory school age to cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability, and aptitude, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.[57]

Education Otherwise was inaugurated in 1977 to give guidance and support to parents who wished to choose this 'otherwise' option. There had been a number of celebrated cases where parents had had to fight for their right to educate their children out of school [58]. Some LEA's held that it was impossible for an 'efficient full-time' education to be provided outside of school and, taking advantage of ambiguities in the 1944 Act, prosecuted parents who wanted to educate their children at home. Education Otherwise aimed to establish the right of parents to choose the 'otherwise' option and to shift the burden of proof from parents having to demonstrate that the education they were providing was 'efficient', to LEA's having to demonstrate that it was not.

By and large, Education Otherwise has been successful in this respect, and through the late 1970s and 1980s its membership expanded as more and more families opted out of formal schooling. It should be noted that not all members do so for reasons which might be described as 'progressive' or 'radical'.

Clearly the number of parents who are in a position to exercise this option is limited, and Education Otherwise has, perhaps unfairly [59], been criticised for being an organisation of middle class people who have withdrawn their energies from the campaign to improve schooling. On the other hand, I

have noted the general absence of parents qua parents from the radical movement; Education Otherwise is a rare example of a parents' initiative (although we should not overlook the Confederation for the Advancement of State Education and the National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations) and it is perhaps unreasonable to expect parents qua parents to become involved in campaigns without having the immediate interests of their own children in the forefront of their minds.

RADICALS IN ALLIED FIELDS

It is important to recognise that radicals in education received moral, if not material, support from other radicals working in related fields. I listed these in chapter 1 (footnote 5, pages 64-65) but some of them merit a little more attention here.

In the field of psychology there was a good deal of radical activity. As Liam Hudson noted, in the mid-1960s

> ...confidence in the scientific approach to psychology began to falter. A shift in the Zetigeist had occurred, unmistakable if unexplained. What had seemed self-evidently true suddenly became a matter of personal opinion, even of prejudice.[60]

Red Rat (subtitled 'The Journal of Abnormal Pychologists') was a magazine devoted to radical critiques of psychology. It first appeared in Summer 1970 and five more issues were published over the next four years. 'Red Rat' was, of course, a satiricial reference to the way that orthodox psychologists did experiments with rats and then attempt to draw conclusions about human behaviour.

More immediately relevant to education was *Humpty Dumpty* which was also produced by radical psychologists, but with an emphasis on educational psychology; several of its editors worked as educational psychologists. *Humpty Dumpty* declared as its aim "to question the role of the expert in psychology". Although there was a fashionable distrust of experts at the time [61], many of the articles in *Humpty Dumpty* were in fact written by people with very specialised knowledge. Supporters of *Humpty Dumpty* saw the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) as a bastion of reactionary psychology and attempted to make radical interventions at AEP conferences.

Seven issues of *Humpty Dumpty*, selling an average of 2,000 copies each, were published between 1972 and 1975; amongst the questions of particular concern to educational radicals which they discussed were special schooling, behaviour scales, ESN assessment, IQ testing and behaviour modification.

The radical psychologists' critique was most fully spelled out in a much praised pamphlet *Rat, Myth and Magic* published in 1972. It stands as a clear manifesto of the positions taken at that time [62]. Other journals which touched on questions of interest to radicals in education included *Self and Society* (published by the Association of Humanistic Psychology), and the journals of the Mental Patients Union, *Cope-Man* and *Heavy Daze*.

We should also mention a seminal article, 'How Psychology Fails the Teacher' by Deena Jefferys [63], which criticised the psychology taught on teacher-training courses and made clear the implications for educational psychology of the radical critique of schooling.

It is a paradox that of all the radical critiques which burgeoned in the 1960s and 1970s, that of psychology was one of the most coherent and yet it made, in the long run, little apparent impact on the mainstream. For example, behaviourism, which radicals argued against in great detail, remained highly influential in educational psychology. Nor, it must be said, did much of the radical psychology make a deep impression on radical teachers: we saw for example in the last chapter how *Socialist Teacher*, for all its attempts to elaborate a socialist theory, paid scant attention to questions of psychology.

In the world of psychology, the establishment seemed peculiarly impervious to the critiques mounted in the 1960s and 1970s, and radical psychologists usually had to go outside the orthodox canons of their subject to make their critiques. This was not the case in sociology, which has had a reputation of fostering radicalism, and radical sociologists were able to claim a certain academic legitimacy for their work which was not available in psychology. It was not always necessary, therefore, for radical sociologists to adopt a fiercely oppositional stand, and much of the radical work can be found in mainstream journals and books. In the field of sociology, we have already discussed *Hard Cheese*, and acknowledgement must also be made of two journals, *Cultural Studies* (published by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) and *Schooling and Culture* (published by the Cultural Studies Department of the Cockpit Theatre), both of which sustained a high level of theoretical debate, especially on the question of culture which has become, for radicals, a key concept in their analysis of education. Mention might also be made of *Screen Education* whose advocacy of the value of the study of film and television has for many years had a markedly radical edge.

Radical Philosophy, launched by the Radical Philosophy Group in 1972, aimed to publish "philosophical work contributing to the development of radical theory, and to the exposure of the social and political assumptions in orthodox philosophy." Although the journal has maintained a high standard of debate over the years (and is one of the few radical journals to have survived and thrived), it did not make an important contribution to the growing interest among educational radicals in philosophical questions, for two reasons. First, it continued the tradition of mainstream British philosophy in that it gave little attention to the philosophy of education: the journal has very rarely carried articles about education as it is thought of by people interested in schooling. Second, it did not share the aspiration of other radical journals (such as *Humpty Dumpty*) which tried to break down the barrier between 'expert' and 'layperson'. Most articles were written in a language which few non-specialist philosophers could understand. Sadly, it probably contributed to the myth, all too easily accepted by teachers, that philosophy is a secret garden best left to philosophers. Perhaps significantly, the two most valuable contributions to radical educational philosophy were made by students: David Adelstein's *The Wisdom and Wit of R.S.Peters* and Keith Paton's *The Great Brain Robbery*.

In contrast, the work of historians in this period made a big impact on radicals in education. The most notable contribution was made by the History Workshop which held stimulating conferences (the 1972 conference on 'Children in History: Children's Liberation' at Ruskin College, Oxford, was particularly well-received), published pamphlets - such as Dave Marson's *Children's Strikes in 1911* - and published *History Workshop Journal*. I have noted elsewhere in this study other contributions made by historians to radical thinking on education.

Many radical groups were committed to 'demystifying' their subjects and to breaking down the barriers of expertise and professionalism. *Needle*, for example, was

> a radical magazine for *all* those working in, or concerned with, the hospital services. It appears about once every six weeks and we expect sales of this latest edition to reach 2,000. It is produced by an editorial collective of technicians, nurses, doctors and medical students who meet every Thursday... ANYONE, from ward maid to consultant is welcome to come along to these meetings.[64]

Yet in reality there was an ambivalence about this. Some people clearly knew a great deal more about their subjects than most other people, and it was not clear what might be gained from 'hiding their light under a bushel'. The ambivalence was also seen in a tension between the awareness that theory was important, often requiring abstract and necessarily difficult work, and a feeling that theory excluded ordinary people from important debates. This is a matter I will return to in later chapters.

DESCHOOLING

Although the notion of deschooling was widely discussed by radicals in the 1970s, it is not my intention to discuss it at length here. The literature on deschooling [65] certainly added to radicals' armoury of criticism of schooling. But, as was widely acknowledged, it did not offer any practical strategy for its implementation. There were a number of educational alternatives which considered themselves to be pioneering deschooling: some free schools thought they were doing so (although Ivan Illich felt that they weren't); the School Without Walls had already embarked upon a number of 'deschooling' projects before the term had been coined; and a number of small-scale attempts were made to establish the 'learning exchanges' advocated by Illich, for example at Centerprise in East London. The small, London-based, De-schooling

Society attempted to establish a learning network with the aim of "broadening the social experience of children by putting them in touch with interesting and interested adults", and to act as a centre for general information on alternatives in education [66].

It is arguable that the idea of deschooling prompted the formation of a variety of non-institutional, community-based, learning programmes which appeared in the 1970s [67]. One example was World Education Berkshire, which had a bus which travelled to schools to promote world development education [68].

But the effect of such small-scale initiatives could well have been to complement, and even improve, schooling rather than contribute towards its abolition - the aim of the deschoolers. It might also be suggested that deschooling took away some of the impetus from the radical movement for the reform of schooling. Illich's clarion call (he came on a speaking tour of Britain in October 1971) split the libertarian movement down the middle, leaving libertarians arguing amongst themselves rather than pursuing a united campaign for school reform. However, the fact was that of all the radical groupings and journals surveyed in the last two chapters, most flatly rejected deschooling. As we have seen, School Without Walls was already working along deschooling lines, but it did not take up the abolition of schools as an objective. *Libertarian Education* was lukewarm about deschooling. The A.S.Neill Trust, Children's Rights Workshop, Education Otherwise, the Resources Programme for Change in Education, and some free schools, can all be said to have taken on some of the thinking of the deschoolers but again, none of these unambiguously advocated the abolition of schools.

At one level, the flaw in the deschooling argument was a political one. It offered no suggestions as to how the task of abolishing schools might be undertaken, and it appealed to no discernible interest group in society. (But, in terms of the political currents of the 1980s, deschooling might be an attractive idea for the 'libertarian' wing of the new right). The curiosity was that Illich's *Deschooling Society* was one of the best-selling education books of this era: by 1985 it had sold over 80,000 copies in the UK. Clearly it had *an* appeal, but it is hard to categorise those to whom it appealed. If we look at the contributory currents to educational radicalism which I outlined in chapter 1, deschooling does not appear to belong to any of them (though it is true that shades of some of them, such as existentialism and an emphasis upon the problems of the third world, may be discerned in Illich's writing). We can only surmise that the idea of deschooling appealed to the growing number of people who became interested in the 1970s in the 'alternative society'.

COMMERCIAL PUBLISHING

To end this chapter I will look briefly at the part played by the commercial publishing houses in Britain. The sheer number of radical books about education which appeared in this period was remarkable. As Alison Truefitt (until 1971 education correspondent of the London Evening Standard, and then a founder of White Lion Street Free School) remembers "They heaped up one after the other and created a tremendously strong head of steam" [69]. Few of these books were published by houses which considered themselves to be radical publishers; in fact the radical publishers of that time were quite slow to appreciate the possibilities of the education market.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the emergence of a considerable number of radical bookshops and bookstalls around the country which provided a ready outlet for these books. And, for those who were not close to such a bookseller, they could be obtained by mail order from agencies such as Agitprop and Rising Free.

The radical books published in this period are listed in the bibliography. A striking fact is that no less than 18 of these titles were published by Penguin. There were two editorially separate Penguin imprints: Pelican (with the familiar blue covers), and Penguin Education. The Pelican imprint published books like Leila Berg's *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive* and the early John Holt books. Penguin Education was started as a separate division of Penguin in the early 1960s, but the editor who was probably most responsible for the radical flavour of the lists was Martin Lightfoot who joined the division in 1966. The most creative sector of Penguin Education was the school books: the *Voices* and *Connexions* series were highly regarded by progressive teachers. But the general reader would have been more aware of the Penguin Education Specials which came out from 1968 onwards. The majority of these were British editions of American books: they had the commercial advantage of being cheap to publish (the school books required a large investment). This was the main avenue by which British readers got to know of Jonathan Kozol, George Dennison, Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, Herbert Kohl, Ivan Illich, Everett Reimer and Paulo Freire. The sales figures indicated that there was considerable interest in these writers.

But the Penguin Education titles brought forth a sharp reaction from right-wing critics. Conservative MP Angus Maude (a contributor to the *Black Papers*) wrote in 1970:

> I hope I am not alone in being thoroughly alarmed by the editorial policies of Penguin Books in the field of education... What is horrifying is that such a large and influential sector of educational publishing should have become a propaganda vehicle for the partisan views not of its authors but of its editors.
>
> These lamentably influential censors clearly do not believe that there can be any alternative viewpoint to the one - 'progressive', egalitarian, permissive, anti-academic, and occasionally straight Marxist - which they themselves so glibly and consistently propound. This kind of blinkered partiality has not, surely, anything in common with the ideals that once inspired Penguin and made it an important and respected institution.[70]

Oxford philosopher Anthony Flew was also much exercised by the output of Penguin Education [71]. Lightfoot responded to such criticisms, amongst other things pointing out that Allen Lane had founded Penguin as a left-wing publishing house [72]. Indeed, during the 1930s Penguin editorial policy had amounted to a sustained critique of the Conservative governments of that decade. The implication in Maude's and Flew's attacks on Penguin, that there is something illegitimate about publishing radical books, was puzzling to those who believed that freedom of speech and publication was an entrenched right in the United Kingdom.

In 1974, following the take-over of Penguin by the Pearson-Longman empire, Penguin management made an abrupt decision to close down the Education division. Charges were made that Pearson-Longman was a right-wing corporation and that the closure of Penguin education was politically motivated. Penguin management asserted that the decision had been taken on purely commercial grounds. The 42 staff made redundant disputed this. It is to be hoped that the truth about this episode will one day be uncovered.

Although Penguin continued to publish education titles after 1974, commissioning of new books by radical writers dwindled virtually to zero, as did the re-printing of American titles which had been such an

exciting feature of Penguin Education. No doubt this contributed to the loss of impetus which the radical movement was experiencing by 1974. The right-wing critics were surely correct when they observed the influential role of Penguin Education, and they may well have felt a quiet satisfaction when this role was snuffed out.

NOTES

1. Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art *The Hornsey Affair* page 9.
2. *Partisans* (Paris) 49, September/October 1969, provides a full documentation of the lycée movement.
3. *Libertarian Education* 16.
4. From SAU report on the conference.
5. Roger Sadiev 'The Free Schools Campaign' in *Libertarian Teacher* 5, page 11.
6. Interview with Trisha Jaffe 28 October 1986.
7. *Times Educational Supplement* 7.11.69.
8. Interview with Trisha Jaffe 28 October 1986.
9. *Democratic Schools*, Third National Conference Issue, page 2.
10. As the theoretical journal *Democratic Schools* clearly shows.
11. See also Martin Hoyles (ed) *Changing Childhood*, part 4, on this question.
12. Frank Musgrove *Ecstasy and Holiness* page 19.
13. Letters from SAU files.
14. Interview with Liza Dresner 11 June 1986.
15. Letter in SAU files: it had been retrieved during the student occupation of Warwick University in 1969.

16. *Ibid*

17. Interview with Liza Dresner 11 June 1986.

18. *Times Educational Supplement* 25.7.69.

19. See *Vanguard* 8, page 3.

20. *Rank & File* 21, page 6.

21. *Revolution in the Schools* paragraph 10.

22. *Vanguard* 9, page 2/3.

23. See Ray Chatwin 'An Experiment in Democracy' in *Radical Education* 1, pages 10-11.

24. *Rebel* 4, page 9.

25. Interview with Liza Dresner 11 June 1986.

26. For an example of this, see Frances Morrell in *Times Educational Supplement* 21.2.69.

27. Interview with Liza Dresner 11 June 1986.

28. Interview with Trisha Jaffe 28 October 1986.

29. See for example, Dave Marson *Children's Strikes in 1911.*

30. *Vanguard* 7, page 1.

31. Interview with Trisha Jaffe 28 October 1986.

32. The International Socialism group changed its name to Socialist Workers Party in 1977.

33. Quoted in Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden *Education and the Working Class* pages 260-261.

34. Jonathan Croall *Neill of Summerhill* page 302.

35. Paul Adams and others *Childrens Rights.*

36. *Ibid* page 189.

37. See Bronislaw Malinowski *The Sexual Life of Savages in North Western Melanesia.*

38. Robert Ollendorf in Paul Adams et al *Childrens Rights* page 114.

39. See *Times Educational Supplement* 23.4.71.

40. Robert Ollendorf in *Childrens Rights* 1, page 19.

41. *Childrens Rights* 1, page 10.

42. *Childrens Rights* 5, page 16.

43. See Jonathan Croall (ed) *All the Best, Neill: Letters from Summerhill* page 91.

44. Childrens Rights Workshop *Newsletter* No 1, pages 23-24.

45. See M.D.A.Freeman *The Rights and Wrongs of Children* and C.A.Wringe *Children's Rights: A Philosophical Study.*

46. See Bob Franklin (ed) *The Rights of Children.*

47. *Radical Education* 1, page 17.

48. School Without Walls *Lunatic Ideas* (edited by Pat Holland).

49. DES and Welsh Office *A New Partnership for our Schools* (The Taylor Report). The Schools Without Walls submission to the Taylor Committee was reprinted in their pack *Learning Not Schooling.*

50. *Radical Education* 1, page 16.

51. Brian Simon *Intelligence Testing and the Comprehensive School.*

52. Arthur Jensen 'How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?' in *Harvard Educational Review* Winter 1969; H.J.Eysenck *Race Intelligence and Education.*

53. See, for example, *Times Educational Supplement* 27.9.74.

54. Questions asked by, for example, Leon Kamin in *The Science and Politics of IQ* and Liam Hudson *The Cult of the Fact* chapter 8.

55. In 1975 for example grants totalling £865 were paid to *Little Digger* magazine, Leeds Free School, North Kensington Free School, Kirkby House Project, Bermondsey Lamp Post, Delta Free School, Moorland Village Project, Basement Writers Project, Brixton Literacy Project and Tyndale School Project.

56. Phil Collins interview 9 September 1986. I will discuss this further in chapter 5, page 264 ff.

57. HMSO *Education Act 1944* page 29.

58. See for example Joy Baker *Children In Chancery.*

59. The social class composition of members of Education Otherwise is discussed by Roland Meighan in 'Home-Based Educators and Education Authorities: the Attempt to Maintain a Mythology' in *Educational Studies* Vol 10, No 3, 1984, page 279.

60. Liam Hudson *op cit* page 74.

61. See Ivan Illich *Disabling Professions*.

62. See also Nigel Armistead (ed) *Reconstructing Social Psychology*, and Bill Gilham (ed) *Reconstructing Educational Psychology*.

63. First published in the alternative press, it was reprinted in *British Journal of Teacher Education* Vol 1 No 1, January 1975, pages 63-69.

64. From *Needle* 6.

65. Principally Ivan Illich *Deschooling Society*; Everett Reimer *School is Dead*; John Holt *Instead of Education*; and Ian Lister (ed) *Deschooling*.

66. *Libertarian Education* 10, page 16.

67. See, for example, the annual reports of Community Projects Foundation.

68. See *WEBNEWS: The Newsletter of World Education Berkshire*.

69. Interview with Alison Truefitt September 1987.

70. Angus Maude 'Biased Penguins' in *The Spectator* 14 November 1970, page 605.

71. See, for example, *The Spectator* 30 September 1972, and Anthony Flew *Sociology, Equality and Education*.

72. See Martin Lightfoot 'A Publisher Remembers', *Times Educational Supplement* 14.6.74, page 40.

CHAPTER 4

A SURVEY OF THE MOVEMENT - FREE SCHOOLS

In this chapter I will conclude my survey of the radical movement by looking at the free schools which were established in the 1970s. After describing the origins of free schools, I will provide factual details about the free schools which were established in Britain, and then discuss the practical difficulties they faced. I will then examine the ideas of the free schoolers under six headings: their philosophy, their relationship with the community, their attitude to structures, the place of free schools in society, libertarian non-intervention, and the strategy of free schooling.

Although some radicals were sceptical of the possibility of achieving - and the wisdom of pursuing - educational change in a capitalist society [1], most radicals felt that there were three possible arenas for change. One was within existing schools; a second was outside schools - such as progressive playgroups, dechooling projects and education 'otherwise'. The third was alternative schools, and that is the subject of this chapter. In discussing free schools at length, in this chapter and in chapters 6 and 7, I do not want to give the impression that they were central to the radical movement. Many, probably most, radicals had great doubts about free schools [2]. They saw them as 'tinkering at the fringes' when what they felt was needed was a concerted campaign to change state schooling. Free schooling was regarded by many as 'dropping out' from the long struggle for good educational provision for all working class children. Worse, free schools, by 'mopping up' some of the problems which conventional

schools did not appear able to solve (such as truancy and disaffected pupils), might reduce the pressure on those schools to make changes. De-schoolers, arguing for the abolition of schools, felt that free schools were possibly more sinister than conventional schools since, in Ivan Illich's words, they "produce a mirage of freedom" [3]. And, finally, those radicals who held that educational change must be part of a broader strategy for general political and social change considered that free schooling had no strategy at all [4].

Free schoolers had replies to such criticisms and I shall consider them in due course. My reason for giving special attention to free schools is that they offer us a rare opportunity to examine radical ideas in practice: 'under laboratory conditions' as it were. Free schools allow us to look at the relationship between radical theory and radical practice. If sceptics could dismiss much educational radicalism as 'mere talk', free schools took the risk of trying to practise what radicals preached.

The history of alternative schools is a long one. There have been several significant traditions: the enterprises of the great innovators - Froebel, Pestalozzi, Montessori, Isaacs, for example; the European libertarian tradition - Robin, Tolstoy, Faure, Ferrer [5]; the German movements [6]; and, most familiar to us in Britain, the independent progressive schools [7]. There is another British tradition which has not been so well chronicled. Whilst the independent progressive schools were fee-paying, residential, rural and served a middle-class clientele, there have also been radical schools intended for the children of ordinary working people. Robert Owen's school at New Lanark is well known; less is known about Barbara Bodichon's Portman Hall venture in the 1850s [8], the Liverpool Communist School and the

International Modern School in the years before 1914 [9]. In the inter-war years the Burston School was a *cause celebre* for radicals, but it was essentially an anachronsim, rather than an exemplar of a continuing tradition [10].

In the main the energies of reformers within the working class movement had gone into striving for state provision of a full schooling for all. Voices which asked whether such provision would necessarily serve working class interests were muted [11]. It was not until the 1960s that schooling for all, up to the age of 16, looked likely to be fully achieved. There was some irony in the fact that this was the decade when a new wave of criticism emerged which asserted that state schooling was thwarting, if not deliberately denying, working class educational aspirations.

There was a growing belief in the 1960s that the mantle of progressivism had been taken over from the independent schools by the maintained sector [12]. State schools were thought to be capable of accomodating any desirable innovation [13]. Free schoolers rejected both of these propositions and started planning independent schools which would be radical and serve working class children.

ORIGINS OF FREE SCHOOLS

'Free Universities' have from time to time been set up - most notably by the syndicalists in Paris in the early years of this century [14]. The idea was taken up in the United States by radical students in the 1960s, and spread to Britain. A venture along these lines was set up in London in 1966, called the London Free School. Its intention was to offer 'counter cultural' educational opportunities to people in the

Notting Hill area of London. It hoped to break down the distinction between teacher and student; it saw the "Free School as an agency of community education and action through attempts to tackle real community problems" [15]. The project hardly got off the ground, and did not really involve children. Its most notable outcome was the establishment of a weekly newspaper *International Times* (*IT*) which was required reading for hippies in the late 1960s.

The first free school for children was established in America in 1962, but it took a long time for the idea to cross the Atlantic. A Free University in Bristol in 1968 (accompanying a student sit-in at the University) gave rise to a number of summer holiday play projects which were known as the Bristol Free Schools. They entertained up to 200 children a day for several weeks [16]. They did not lead, however, to any provision for children during term-time. A Birmingham Free University did lead to the establishment in 1972 of St.Paul's Community School in Balsall Heath, but the first free school proper to be established in Britain was the Scotland Road Free School which opened in Liverpool in 1971.[17]

There are three senses in which schools have been called 'free' schools: free in the sense that they do not charge fees; free from the constraints laid down by church, state or other authority; and free in the sense of adopting a philosophy of maximum individual freedom for the children. The first two senses have a long tradition [18]. For example, Jeremy Bentham [19] wrote in 1817 of Westminster Free School, established by the National Society in 1812: it had 1,000 pupils, boys and girls. Some schools today incorporate the word 'free' in the first two senses, into their names - such as the Jewish Free School in North

London (now known as JFS Comprehensive school) or the Liverpool Free School in the pre-war period. 'Free' school in the third sense - indicating an emphasis on individual freedom for children - is usually ascribed to Kristen Kold who set up the first free school in Denmark in 1852 [20].

There has been a certain amount of confusion in the literature about 'free schools' and 'deschooling'. W.Kenneth Richmond wrote a book about deschooling which he called *The Free School*; Robin Barrow subtitled his book *Radical Education* 'A Critique of Free Schooling and Deschooling' but he did not observe any distinction between the two. It is not, however, difficult to tell the difference. Deschoolers want to abolish schools, including free schools; free schoolers do not.

The free schools of the 1970s were free in all the three senses mentioned above. But what counted as a free school, and what didn't, was a matter of dispute. The Children's Rights Workshop suggested "at the risk of general disapproval" the following criteria:

> a) these schools are small, have a flexible non-hierarchical structure, and are housed in non-specialist premises; they cater for a small number of children - never more than 100 - and practise a high ratio of adults to children; b) these schools have a child-centred approach to learning and child-care and encourage maximum access to choice in the learning process; c) these schools are urban and serve inner-city populations; d) these schools have been set up as clear alternatives to the state controlled education system. [21]

To this list we can add further characteristics of the free schools in the 1970s. They were mostly independent schools, set up on small-scale local initiatives. Most were committed to democratic control involving parents, children and staff. All stressed open-ness in a number of senses - they were non-selective in their admissions, open to parents at all times, offered their resources to the local community, and tended to open longer hours and more often (including weekends and

vacations) than conventional schools. They were open, too, in the sense of avoiding closed meetings or keeping secret files. Few of the free schools made lessons compulsory, and all were committed to non-coercive arrangements. They tended to stress informality and equality between staff, children and parents. In many cases they cut across orthodox age ranges. And they avoided division of labour, with children as well as staff involved in school-keeping, maintenance, cooking, cleaning, administration and so forth.

Much of the inspiration for these schools came from A.S.Neill's Summerhill and, to a lesser extent, John Aitkenhead's Kilquahanity, and Monkton Wyld in Dorset. But, as we shall see, they were very different from these fee-paying rural boarding schools. Although by this time Neill was feeling very old, and was not able to give much active support, he did write to *The Guardian* hailing the opening of Scotland Road Free School:

> For 50 years I have regretted that, because of finance, I could take middle-class pupils only. It is a joy to read that John Ord [co-founder of Scotland Road] has taken freedom to the children of the poor... I wish John all the success in the world but advise him to throw away that fag in his mouth and take to a pipe.[22]

It has often been said that a large number of free schools were established in the 1970s [23]. Many towns and cities had groups of people who planned to set up a free school. Sometimes they would get something going, with a handful of children, but typically the venture would founder within a few weeks. In fact only 14 or 15 free schools can be said to have been properly established in Britain, and they are detailed on the next pages. My criteria for inclusion here are schools which offered full-time provision for five or more children and lasted for longer than one school term.

FREE SCHOOLS IN BRITAIN

	Opened	Closed	Number of children at peak	Ages of children	Premises	Registered with DES as an independent school?
[1] Kirkdale School Lewisham, London SE26	1965	Still open	60	3 - 12	Suburban Villa	Yes
Scotland Road Free School, Liverpool 5	1971	1974	94	10 - 16	Youth Club, then Church Hall, then disused primary school	Yes
[1] Durdham Park School, Redland, Bristol 6.	1971	1978		5 - 16	Suburban Villa with spacious grounds	
South Villas Comprehensive, became Freightliners Free School, Camden, London NW1	1972	1976	22	6 - 15	Basement of private house then disused goods yard	Yes
[2] Parkfield Street, Moss Side, Manchester	1972	1973	10	10 - 16	Dilapidated house	?
Manchester Free School, various Manchester locations	1973	1979?	36		Various	Yes
[3] St. Paul's Community School, also called Balsall Heath Community School, Birmingham 12	1972	Still Open	35	11 - 16	Community centre	Yes
White Lion Street Free School, Islington, London N1	1972	Still open	50	3 - 16	Ex-hostel for homeless	Yes (until 1982)
Brighton Free School	1972	1973	16	5 - 15	Hired rooms, then Church Hall	Yes
Leeds Free School, various Leeds locations	1973	1982?	40	3 - 16	Disused chapel, private houses	No
Barrowfield Community School, Glasgow 40	1973	1978	24	12 - 16		Scottish Office

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Continues

FREE SCHOOLS IN BRITAIN ... continued

	Opened	Closed	Number of children at peak	Ages of children	Premises	Registered with DES as an independent school?
[4] Bermondsey Lamp Post, Bermondsey, London SE16	1973	1977	20	3 - 16	Rented room in Christian Mission	Yes
[5] The New School, also known as The Buxmoor Centre, later called Sundance Free School	1973	1976?				No
Vauxhall Free School	1973	1974	20	11 - 16	Dilapidated shop	No
Delta Free and Community School, Southampton	1974	1978	8	3 - 15	Rented terraced house	Yes
[4] North Kensington Community School, London W11	1975	1978	10	12 - 16	Adventure playground hut, rented rooms, dilapidated house, space in community centre, hut.	No
Bronte Free School, Liverpool 3	1976	1980	14	11 - 15	Small workshop	Yes

Notes: 1. Kirkdale and Durdham Park are included for the sake of completeness, although both were fee-paying.
2. Parkfield Street Free School is described in David Head Free Way to Learning.
3. St. Paul's Community School was a 'free school' only in its first years. It subsequently developed away from the free school model.
4. Ber mondsey Lamp Post and North Kensington Community School ceased to be free schools when they were taken over by the ILEA as truancy centres, in 1977 and 1978 respectively.
5. I have not been able to discover any information about the New School/Sundance Free School.

It is by no means certain that this list is complete or accurate. (Criteria for inclusion: offering full-time provision for five or more children, and surviving for more than one school term). The Children's Rights Workshop tried to keep a register of free schools, and when it closed the task was taken over by White Lion Street Free School. Since the onus was on new schools to notify themselves to these registrars, we cannot know if any did not do so. Whilst some free schools attracted publicity, others were almost secretive (for example Meadowside School in Lancaster, which closed after one term).
Sutton Park School in Dublin (1957 - 1972), run by Ruarc Gahan, might be included in this list. (Details in Libertarian Education No 11).

In terms of numbers, the contrast with America is marked. There, by 1967, there were 30 free schools. 50 more were established in 1967 and 1968, 60 to 80 more in 1969, and in 1970 over 150 further free schools opened [24]. The boom peaked in the early 1970s [25].

A distinction may be made, although it is not absolutely clear-cut, between free schools on the one hand and the numerous other alternative education projects which sprung up in the 1970s. These belong to a tradition of their own (Homer Lane's Little Commonwealth, the Farmhouse Schools, Finchden Manor, Hawkspur and Barns, Otto Shaw's Red Hill and Howard Case's Epping House) which has specialised in providing for children designated as 'problems' - persistant truants, 'disruptive pupils', maladjusted children and other categories judged to be better served away from the normal school. Just as the free schools broke with the rural boarding tradition and set up shop in inner cities, so did these other new alternatives. Many of them were barely distinguishable from free schools. Often staffed by people who were sympathetic to free schools, they would even be called 'free schools' by the children who attended them. Some of these projects were funded by local authority Social Services Departments; others by LEA Schools Pyschological Services; yet others from Intermediate Treatment funds. Some were set up or adopted by LEAs and designated 'special units'. Some were voluntary bodies raising their funds from charities.

Some excellent accounts of such alternative education projects have been published [26] and the phenomenon of 'special units' has been studied by the DES [27]. I have excluded these projects from my study - even though they may be regarded as an expression of the same radical dissatisfaction with schooling which gave rise to free schools - for several reasons. They did not call themselves free schools. Unlike free

schools, they considered themselves to be offering some kind of 'treatment'. Unlike free schools, they considered themselves to be complementing conventional schools, doing essentially short-term work with youngsters and, usually, having the aim of returning them to mainstream schools as soon as possible. Unlike most free schools, they were not registered as independent schools. And more broadly, in terms of the dilemma I shall discuss in the next chapter, they considered themselves to be working 'within the system' whereas free schools saw themselves as outside of, if not against, 'the system': staff in these alternative education projects usually received Burnham salaries whereas staff in free schools often received no salary at all or at best received very much less than Burnham rates.

Having said that, the distinction is not a watertight one. Two of the free schools I have listed - Freightliners and North Kensington Community School - received funding from the ILEA as truancy projects, and a third - Bermondsey Lamp Post - eventually did so. The first two of these originated in adventure playgrounds where play-leaders who found themselves with a group of truants 'hanging around' during school hours resolved to lay on alternative provision for them. In the sense that they targetted a specific group of youngsters from the start, they were not typical of free schools. More common was a group of adults with radical ideas who went out to look for children with whom their ideas could be put into practice.

THE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS OF FREE SCHOOLS

The extent of the interest in free schoools may be gauged from the fact that a booklet published by White Lion Street Free School - *How To*

Set Up A Free School - sold some 6,000 copies. Why were free schools so much talked about yet so rarely established? And why did those that did get started often close down quite quickly? The answer lies largely in the practical difficulties: resources, finding support, obtaining premises, the hostility of LEAs, problems of planning, and the burdens on the people involved.

Few planners of free schools ever got beyond the first hurdle - finance. The obvious sources - jumble sales, donations from well-wishers, even the life savings of members of the planning group - did not begin to meet basic costs. Grant-giving bodies, such as charitable trusts, were reluctant to commit scarce resources to schemes which were only at the planning stage. For many groups the problem remained unsolved.

Interesting light is thrown on the free school movement by this money problem. In America 80 per cent of free schools charged fees [28], but in Britain this was unthinkable. We have here an example of the paramountcy of principle which I discussed in chapter 1. Fees would restrict access to families who had money and would think of spending it on schooling. English radicals, identifying themselves closely with the working class movement [29], were interested only in 'the children of the poor' as Neill had put it. Even the compromise made by most American free schools (and by Kirkdale, Durdham Park and Monkton Wyld in England) of charging fees on a sliding scale, so that poor families needed to pay very little, was generally rejected. Better, it seemed, to have no free school at all than one which compromised on a basic principle.

In fact a free school which was well established, well run, and administered by people with 'PR skills' *could* raise money in Britain. There were moments in the history of White Lion Street Free School when it had so much money that special meetings were needed to work out how to spend it. But in this respect White Lion was quite exceptional.

Free schools which did get started found it relatively easy to obtain resources in kind. Local firms would happily donate materials (quantities of paint in discontinued colours explained the bizarre colour schemes in several free schools). People were always ready to donate books, and LEAs, reluctant to help in other ways, seemed glad to part with unwanted furniture. Creative use of scrap materials gave a sound ecological edge to free school projects.

Just as difficult as raising money was finding premises. The table on pages 188 and 189 shows the kind of premises those free schools managed to find. Scotland Road for example led a nomadic existence from YMCA to Church Hall to the disused primary school which was eventually made available by the City Council. The commonest solution was to find a private house scheduled for demolition. Such premises were likely to be dilapidated and often unsuitable. A building that felt like a home (rather than an institution) had its advantages, helping to cultivate the kind of family atmosphere which free schools sought. But the snags were serious: the lack of any room big enough for large-scale activities like meetings, dinners, drama, games; the dominating presence of the staircase; inappropriate plumbing; fire and safety hazards; the lack of space for specialist activities like science. For those free schools lucky enough to find any premises at all, such problems conspired to make their work all the more difficult [30].

The lack of substantial public support for free school projects can be traced to the fact that no appreciable class, power group or interest group was attracted to free schooling - in other words, free schools lacked a power base [31]. This, perhaps, was where the free school movement's lack of strategy was most keenly felt. In the words of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, the free school movement

> ... has presented its ideals as universal; it has remained puzzled by its lack of acceptance by other social groupings - among which oppressed minorities and the traditional working class are only the most obvious.[32]

In chapter 7 I will show that White Lion Street Free School failed to attract ethnic minorities; and whilst it did attract working class people, they were attracted not as members of a class which approved the free school philosophy but as individuals seeking an escape from pressing personal difficulties. People who wanted to start free schools, or support them, are hard to classify. In the view of the founder of one free school, they were just "people who didn't fit in" [33]. Although I have located free schools within the radical movement, ironically they lacked the support of any significant grouping even within that small movement [34]. Free schoolers spurned their most likely constituency - 'trendy' middle class people who might have been hippies five years earlier. But they were not welcomed by the Labour movement. Trade Unions were wholly uninterested in free schools; so were the political parties, the churches and ethnic organisations.

The most tangible support for free schools came from the mass media. There was a great deal of coverage of free schools (Scotland Road especially) in the press and on television, much of it, perhaps surprisingly, favourable. Even the *Daily Mail* praised Scotland Road. Support did come, too, from progressive academics [35]. However,

neither of these sources of moral support were sufficient to help free schools over the practical hurdles they faced.

Curiously, a 1979 survey by the Institute of Community Studies of attitudes to schooling in the London Borough of Hackney found that 20 per cent of respondents would have liked a free school for their child had there been one available in their locality [36]. This suggests the possibility that had LEA's offered parents a variety of educational alternatives for their children, in the way that Canada's City of Toronto does [37] they might have been agreeably surprised by the take-up. Notwithstanding the efforts of pressure groups like the Campaign For State Supported/Alternative Schools [38], no British LEA rose to this challenge. If indeed there was a pool of latent support for free schooling among parents at large, the free school movement did not succeed in tapping it.

Most free schools experienced frostiness, if not hostility, from their LEA:

> The day prior to opening we had been to see the CEO [Chief Education Officer] and his deputy in response to their request to do so. The discussion proved of greater use to them than us since it involved going over many of those all too familiar objections to free schools as well as some necessary clarification of the limits of the 1944 Education Act... Within a week both these gentlemen had called to see the school for themselves and we await with interest their verdict and subsequent moves. In spite of this not too promising first encounter with officialdom we remain hopeful that in the long run some sort of rapport might develop which will, no doubt, be hastened by our demonstrating our capacity to survive and prosper. [39]

Some LEAs took the view that free schools were not a serious attempt to provide education for children and insisted that children attending them were absent from school. The parents of these children could therefore be prosecuted for failing to ensure their child's education

in accordance with the law [40]. An example was the case of Theresa Beer who joined Leeds Free School in April 1978, having truanted persistently from her previous school. The Leeds LEA attempted to prosecute her parents and Leeds Free School mounted an energetic campaign in their defence.

Within the LEA, it is the job of the inspectorate to form a judgement as to whether a child is receiving an adequate education. In practice, then, the free school's relationship with their LEA hinged upon the kind of understanding they were able to reach with their local inspector. Inspectors ranged from the implacably hostile to the sympathetic - it was 'the luck of the draw'.

Most free schools opted for the legal status of being independent schools [41] although they made problems for themselves if they did not do this until after they had opened, which was often the case. The school has to register with the Department of Education and Science which automatically grants provisional registration. This is followed by a visit from HMIs who must satisfy themselves that certain requirements - the suitability and adequacy of the premises, the suitability and efficiency of the instruction, and the suitability of staff - are met before registration proper is granted.

Once a free school was registered as an independent school the LEA needed no longer to concern itself. (But some free schools unwisely thought that they needed no longer to attempt to cultivate constructive working relationships with the LEA). Responsibility for keeping an eye on the school now rested with HMI. As A.S.Neill discovered on a famous visitation [42] HMIs are capable of breadth of vision, and free schools often found HMIs more open-minded than their LEA counterparts. Scotland

Road was inspected by HMIs in June 1972, and registration proper was witheld only on the grounds that the premises were unsuitable. White Lion Street Free School came out unscathed from a full inspection in January 1974. Up until 1978 the DES could award independent schools the accolade 'recognised as efficient'. No free school ever sought this status (nor did Summerhill) and it is unlikely that they would have achieved it.

If LEAs did little to help free schools in their early days, some came gradually to help in limited ways, most notably by agreeing to pay for school dinners, and to make various other resources available. But to achieve even this minimal level of cooperation required a degree of diplomacy and negotiating ability which did not come easily to every free schooler. The founders of Delta Free School, for example, did not think to contact their LEA until the day before they opened. LEAs can hardly be blamed for a frosty attitude if free schools failed to take elementary steps to prepare the ground for their venture.

To get a free school established required a considerable degree of competence in planning, organisation and negotiation. But some of the people who wanted to set up free schools came from a milieu which placed a fairly low valuation on competence, efficiency, planning and organisation: such things were considered to be characteristic of an impersonal, uncaring, inflexible and bureaucratised system which was precisely what they wanted to get away from. Sometimes the attitude was that the LEA needed to be attacked, not negotiated with. Not to put too fine a point on all this, many of the people who talked of starting free schools simply never got to the starting line. These remarks do not, of course, apply to those who did successfuly establish free

schools, but even then there were wide variations in competence and organisation.

We should remember that in the early years of free schooling there was nowhere that would-be free schoolers could turn to for help. Later in the 1970s help was offered by White Lion Street Free School, by the Advisory Centre for Education, and by the Campaign for State Supported Alternative Schools. But at the start there was little to go on. As Allen Graubard describes the American experience:

> Very few people who organised [free] schools had actually seen or worked in a free school, so what they had to go on was a concrete sense of what was wrong with public [ie state] schools and an abstract hope of how marvellous "free learning" would be.[43]

It was the same in Britain and clearly this was of little help in surmounting the difficulties I have described.

Having got a school started, the pressures on staff were heavy. Most free schools were reliant on one or two strong and competent people, a fact which somewhat belied the ideals of equality and power-sharing. Once these key people left, the schools were in danger of falling apart. Every free schooler experienced exhaustion:

> ...it was shattering all the time. You never got time off. You couldn't divide your day between us and them - or even space between us and them. There was constant interaction, which is exhausting. It was a very close, very intense, and very exhausting process for everyone.[44]

Even resilient personalities (and not everyone who was attracted to work in a free school was resilient) soon experienced 'burn out' [45]. The few free schools which survived the departure of key staff nevertheless suffered from the high staff turnover. Exhaustion and staff turnover meant that things that needed doing were often left undone - a common problem of free schools.

All the free schools exploited their workers in a manner which would have scandalised a Victorian mill owner. (Since free schools were collectively run, it would be more accurate to say that free school workers exploited themselves.) This was not, of course, wholly deliberate. None of the free schools had enough money to pay their workers proper salaries (bar the two which were funded as truancy centres). Indeed very few of the free schools paid any salaries at all to their workers, who had to subsist on unemployment benefits or supplementary benefits. In general there was a marked discrepancy between the emphasis which free schools gave to the rights of children and scant attention they gave to the rights of workers.

Every person who worked in a free school was willing to make sacrifices because they were committed to the school's ideals, but there was an unwillingness to ask what are the limits to the sacrifices adults can be expected to make for the benefit of children. (Such questions lead into a grey area where absolute principles have to be compromised in deference to reality). Free school staff worked long hours under poor conditions, constantly struggling against the destructiveness and sometimes hostility of children. It is not certain that this was good for the children, let alone the workers. In passing, we might offer the hypothesis that the willingness of free school staff to work under such conditions made them unacceptable as role models to the children attending the schools: in the words of several White Lion children, and parents, they were 'mugs'.

There are two further comments I wish to make on free school staff. First, despite the fact that free schools were adamant that they did not require formal qualifications of their staff, the majority of people who worked in free schools were university graduates and/or

trained teachers. Second, despite the fact that free schools would appear to owe more to the anarchist tradition than anything else, very few of the people who set up free schools were anarchists. It is, in fact, hard to find a political label which describes the assortment of people who worked in free schools: perhaps 'libertarian socialist' would describe a number of them, although in general their preference for 'prefigurative' politics, as against 'organisational' or 'strategic' politics (see page 245) would make such labels inappropriate.

If the practical difficulties of free schools which we have been considering help to explain why so few free schools were established in Britain, they do not explain why free schools were so *late* in coming. As we have seen, the first free school in America opened in 1962, yet Britain's first free school did not open until 1971. It was as if what was needed was a trigger to set off a British free school movement: and Scotland Road acted as that trigger. But the delay in starting up free schools was to prove a handicap. By 1971 the spirit of the 1960s - the romanticism, radicalism, idealism, iconclasm, inventiveness - which gave rise to free schools was already fading. As we saw in chapter 2, a 'new realism' (or perhaps a weary resignation) was taking over. "Be realistic: demand the impossible" had been a slogan of the 1960s, but by the 1970s economic recession was biting deep into European social structures. The free schoolers' dream, that 'a hundred flowers would bloom' with free schools opening in every town and village until they provided a nation-wide alternative to state schooling, remained just a dream.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREE SCHOOLS

In attempting to define free schools (pages 185-187 above) I made no reference to their educational ideas; instead I defined them in terms of the organisational and administrative characteristics which they had in common. That was the easy way of defining them. When we come to consider their educational philosophy, it gets more difficult. Free schools were much clearer about what they were against than what they were for. Their starting point was a critique of existing schools; the one thing they were certain of was that they weren't going to be like *them*.

One of the more positive statements of philosophy was made by Barrowfield Community School. Here is an extract from their *Progress Report*:

> The running of the school is based on three straightforward principles.
>
> The first is our belief that education is a natural process and is intrinsically interesting. We feel that the onus should be on the teachers to present it in such a way as to be interesting and directly relevant to each child's experience, interests and propects. (Because of this we often work in much smaller groups than is normal in other schools).
>
> Each activity and course of study is in the last resort, a matter of choice to each pupil and it is up to the teachers to find out each pupil's interests and develop both the interests and the skills needed for this development.
>
> Secondly, responsibility for the pupils' general welfare, rather than strictly educational needs, is assumed by the school. This means that teaching at the school is much less of a nine to four profession. In fact, the times of activities range from 9.30 am until the early evening, although the teachers are frequently involved in school or school related community matters in the evenings, at weekends and during the holiday periods.
>
> The third educational principle involves the school's relationship to the community and specifically to an inner-city deprived area such as Barrowfield.
>
> Firstly the school's attitude towards responsibility involves the teachers in community affairs - usually in the organisation of

activities that involve not only the school's pupils but other people in the area - perhaps older brothers, sisters, parents etc.

We feel that the child's education consists not only in the understanding of his environment and the problems of living in a deprived area but also in learning how to cope with them and beginning to solve them.

Community activities not only involve children in this but also, on another level, relieve enough of the pressures of living to make an educational process possible.

Hence while the school, through activities and educational experiences, opens up to its pupils a whole avenue of opportunities, which at the moment are not available (in any meaningful sense of the word) to residents of the area, it, at the same time, tries to make it apparent that the solution to the lack of resources, amenities and activities so often lies in action as a community and co-operation with people in the same situation.

We believe that if we can reach a situation where these three principles are followed successfully then the school will produce people who, on the one hand, can reach a level of self-fulfilment whilst living in a difficult environment and, on the other hand, have the confidence and knowledge to do something about those conditions.[46]

At this stage I want to note several points in this statement to which I will return later. First there is a characteristic appeal to 'natural', 'interests' and 'relevance', although these concepts are not defined or examined. Second there is the central place given to the community which I shall discuss later in this chapter. And third, it is not specific about what children will learn in the school, nor how they will learn it. In contrast to some free schools, however, Barrowfield clearly envisaged a role for the teacher. This is a question I will return to in chapter 8.

Leeds Free School stated their outlook in this way:

Underlying all our ideas about a Free School is the concept that children are *not* objects whose only need is to be rationalised into society, nor should they be treated as such; rather they are all human beings, each with differing needs and abilities. Yet this tendency to reification is inherent in the nature of a State School, with its large classes, fixed syllabuses, compulsory attendance, etc., and even the best will in the world cannot overcome it.

In a school, however, which is run directly by the children, parents and teachers - where they themselves decide what is relevant; in a school which is small, has a high adult to child ratio, a school which is, in its essence, decentralised to allow maximum flexibility for each person's needs, this tendency may be overcome. Such is the nature of a free school. It is a school where the children tailor *their* education to *their* own needs.

We firmly believe that only in such a school can each child's creativity and capabilities be developed to a maximum. In a State School there is so much 'wastage', so much talent ignored, so many 'products' (and in many case this is the correct word to use) lacking in confidence and ability to stand on their own two feet. The adults coming out of a Free School, however, would, we hope, be confident, aware, and capable of building a better world.

The majority of Leeds children are victims rather than beneficiaries of the State education system (Leeds is the second worst borough in the country for expenditure on books per pupil). This system produces exceptionally high absentee rates in the secondary modern schools and a bored elite in the high schools suffering from a cramming of useless information bearing little relation to the problems of modern life.

A Free School in one of the communities of Leeds will provide a working practical alternative to the centralised system, an alternative that will allow the community to work with and for its children in a framework that is under community control. It is the organisational structure of a Free School that provides this framework.

What Is A Free School?

a) Self-government

This means that the school is controlled and run by its members on an equal basis. Children, teaching staff and those who in general cater for the welfare of the children have an equal say, all decisions being taken at a General Assembly. This principle virtually abolishes the concept of 'pupils' and 'staff' as two separate entities, with separate aims and interests.

b) Lack of coercion

This relates to the principle of self-government. However, it is possible under extenuating circumstances that the General Assembly will impose disciplinary measures on any person in the school who is constantly interfering with the freedom of others there.

c) Education as self-fulfilment

It is fairly obvious that, in the type of school which we have outlined, there will be no rigid curriculum. The relationship of academic learning to practical activity (by which the children may learn a great deal, incidentally) will not be compulsory, but the idea, practice and feeling of genuine democracy will, we feel, encourage members of the school to participate in such meetings.

> Attendance at lessons will not be compulsory, but attendance at the school is compulsory by law. This is really the only basic compulsion at a Free School.[47]

The emphasis here (in addition to the organisational proposals and the criticisms of 'State Schools') is on the old progressive tenets - the importance of the individual, child-centredness, tailoring education to individual needs, creativity, developing capabilities to the maximum. Like Barrowfield, Leeds Free School appeals to 'relevance' and 'needs' without defining them. And even more than Barrowfield, Leeds is highly unspecific when it comes to saying what children will actually *do* in the free school.

Scotland Road, in its preliminary announcement, was rather more outspoken:

> Only those who are educated in the fullest sense of the word, imaginative and creative; mature and tolerant; aware and concerned can cope with the pressures and complexities of modern society. It is only those schools that consciously create an atmosphere of understanding and tolerance that best allow these qualities to develop.
>
> The ultimate aim of the free school is to bring about a fragmentation of the state system into small, all age, personalised, democratic, locally controlled schools which can best serve the immediate needs of the area in which they are situated.
>
> It is felt that the state system in contemplating change considers only innocuous reforms which do not question the total structure. We are obliged therefore to step outside the system in order to best demonstrate the feasibility and fulfilment of the free school idea. Having achieved this demonstration we are sure that society will enforce the adoption of the free school idea by the state system.[48]

The statement cites the Danish free schools as models, and then continues:

> Recently an American writer defined freedom as being useful, involved, aware of and concerned with people and their life and problems in society. He stressed that real freedom exists, not in dropping out of society, but in making a positive approach to life's problems. We desire to produce adults who understand and live within this definition of freedom.[49]

The leaflet goes on to describe the organisational forms of the school, which are along similar lines to those of other free schools.

There is not much sign in these statements (or in any of the other statements of British free schools) of a coherently worked-out philosophy of education. In particular, little thought seems to have been given to the general question of the *aims* of education, to the matter of content of learning, and to how children learn. If their preliminary pronouncements gave little indication of what free schools were actually going to do when they got started, descriptions of what happened once they were established showed that they were floundering - in some cases badly [50]. White Lion Street Free School produced rather more sophisticated statements which I shall be discussing in chapters 6 and 7. For the time being, I will discuss four issues raised by the statements we have looked at. These are the relationship between the school and the community; the emphasis on organisational structures; the place of free schools in society; and the libertarian theory of non-intervention. I will then go on to consider the strategy of free schooling.

THE FREE SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

It is evident from the literature that the notion of 'community' was important to free schools. Several of them incorporated the word into their names - the Scotland Road Community Trust, St.Paul's Community School, Leeds Free School and Community Trust, Barrowfield Community School, Delta Free and Community School, North Kensington Community School. It was the same in America, where most of the free schools called themselves community schools.

Of course, at that time 'community' was a fashionable word: call your project 'community' something and it would be guaranteed approval in 'with it' circles. But there was more to it than that. At its simplest, 'community' expressed a commitment to a specific locality. In contrast to the independent progressive schools which took their pupils from all over the country (and all over the world), free schools limited their access to children living nearby. And they wanted to build organic links within the neighbourhood. Many of the free schools took on neighbourhood functions: Bermondsey Lamp Post ran a 'shop' which helped people with housing, legal and social problems; Freightliners ran a lunch club for old-age pensioners; Scotland Road ran, amongst other things, a community transport scheme; St.Paul's was part of a much larger community project; White Lion ran an open youth club. Although there may have been a rather romanticised image of community - in virtually every case, the local community was in a state of chronic decline: the image of South Wales pit villages or Coronation Street bore little resemblance to the places where free schools set up - genuine attempts were made to build a two-way relationship with local communities which most conventional schools were believed to lack. In this aim, some free schools were moderately successful, others not.

There is little evidence that the high-minded principles enunciated by free schoolers struck a chord with ordinary local people. This is not to say that free schools failed to recruit working class children. Some were flooded with applications and had to turn children away. But as we shall see, this should perhaps be understood as a desire to get away from an unpleasant experience (local schools) rather than as a sign of widespread approval for libertarian ideas. The *intention* of free schools to set up in inner city areas, to charge no fees, to admit all-comers and to invite democratic control was a distinctive break with

the independent progressive tradition. But whilst the independent progressive schools offered an ethos which harmonised with that of their pupils and parents (why else would they pay the fees?) the free schools often found themselves defending their values in the face of scepticism from parents and children.

The free schools' appeal to community had another significance: there was an implicit distinction made between 'community interest' on the one hand and the 'national interest' on the other. The latter was thought to be only 'ruling class interest' in disguise, and so the appeal to 'community' could be interpreted as saying 'conventional schools serve *their* interests, but free schools will serve *our* interests' [51].

There was an attempt, too, to get away from notions of 'community care' in which professionals attempt to solve a community's problems for it [52]. Free schools stressed community self-help and *action* by indigenous community groups themselves. This underlies the much stronger concept of community found in the opening paragraphs of Scotland Road's first statement:

> There will be set up in the Scotland Road-Vauxhall area of Liverpool, an alternative type of school to be known as Scotland Road Free School. The school will be a community school which will be totally involved in its environment...The nature of this involvement will be such that the school will be in the vanguard of social change in the area. By accepting this role, the school will not seek to impose its own values, but will have as its premise the total acceptance of the people and the area...[53]

We find here the idea of schooling-as-social-action which was to receive a good deal of attention the following year when Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published in Britain. This goes decisively beyond a mere sensitivity of the school to its community

[54] and gives the school an integral role in taking social (and political) action. In Europe the idea had been pioneered by the 'doposcuola' movement in Italy from 1968 [55]. It is an idea which has been widely discussed, both in its overtly political forms [56] and in 'community action' terms [57]. It is a discussion I will return to in chapter 8.

Scotland Road's stance was more explicitly political, and more aggressive, than any other free school. This gave it a driving sense of purpose which other free schools lacked. Most free schools (whatever the private intentions of their founders) couched their public statements in terms of an appeal to consensus: they tried to present themselves as a sensible response - which no reasonable person could ignore - to an appalling crisis in schooling. Those who didn't agree with them were perceived as doing so because they hadn't read the situation correctly, which in part explains the emphasis which free schoolers placed on criticising orthodox schooling.

Scotland Road's stand won it friends - and enemies. Clearly the idea of engaging children in social and political action (Scotland Road took children to join trade union picket lines and so forth) is controversial. As long ago as 1943 Margaret Mead had warned, *a propos* of the view that it is possible by education to build a better world:

> When small children are sent out by overzealous schoolteachers to engage in active social reforms - believed necessary by their teachers - the whole point of view becomes not only ridiculous but dangerous to the children themselves.[58]

Scotland Road Free School became a national *cause célèbre* and an *enfant terrible*. Press and TV gave it an extraordinary amount of attention, and in the year 1973/4 it received some 2,000 visitors (creating an impossible burden [59]). Although notoriety brought some pleasures and

benefits, it ultimately placed too much strain on the school, which closed in 1974. The bitterness and recrimination lasted for several years. But Scotland Road was outstanding amongst free schools in building real links with local people and helping to develop a collective sense of community purpose.

It is not possible to say that free schools successfully pioneered the practice of education as social action. They did not last long enough to demonstrate how it might work, nor to develop the theory. However, the idea remains of interest to radicals, and it may be noted that the thinking of Freire has had a considerable influence on the development of adult community education in Britain.

STRUCTURES

Whilst orthodox schools thought mainly in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, the free schools emphasised *structures*:

> The whole significance of the Free School lies in its pioneering of new structures, both in relation to the community, and in terms of "curriculum", the role of teachers, parents and students, and of day-to-day organisation... words like structure and curriculum acquire a new meaning in our situation.[60]

It is necessary to understand this 'new meaning' of structure. Teachers usually think of 'structure' as referring to a well-planned, tightly organised, well-controlled classroom where everyone is clear what they are supposed to be doing. This is not what free schools had in mind. Rather, they used it to refer to the environment in which learning was to take place. Three insights were relevant: first the notion that children learn from the 'hidden curriculum' [61]; second, that form, content and method are indivisible; and third, a sensitivity to the

conditions of learning, drawn to popular attention by writers like John Holt, George Dennison, Jonathan Kozol and R.F.Mackenzie.

Free schools held that it was the whole environment from which children learn: thus they claimed 'our school *is* its curriculum': "the Free School curriculum is the total experience which it provides for its children." [62] Hence, for example, the democratic structure of free schools was not just an organisational matter to involve parents and children in decision making: from this structure children would learn things like the practice of democracy and the skills of public speaking. From the open and equal relationships between the staff, children would learn to model their own relationships likewise. By making no lessons compulsory, and by neither rewarding successful students nor penalising unsuccessful ones, children would learn that their own valuation of their learning was the most important one.

This emphasis on the educative power of structures has a long pedigree in the libertarian tradition. As Michael Smith puts it:

> For the most part libertarians did not see their ideals as being taught formally through the curriculum but rather as being expressed through the way in which education was conducted.[63]

Whilst we need not doubt that structures - in the sense in which free schoolers referred to them - are an influential component of learning (although this is not universally recognised [64]) what may be questioned is whether it is *enough* to get the structures right and then just hope for the best. This is a question I shall return to in chapter 6. It is arguable that the free schools' concern to get their structures 'right' distracted them for giving attention to other questions which are equally important - such as curriculum or how children learn.

THE PLACE OF FREE SCHOOLS IN SOCIETY

We can detect in the free schooling literature (especially in the statements made by free schools) an ambivalence about their relationship to society. On the one hand there is a considerable amount of talk about *changing* society, particularly at a local level. On the other hand, there are signs of a desire to withdraw from any acknowledgement of obligation to society. In this respect they followed Neill who:

> ...never considered that education should acknowledge any duty to society to ensure that the new generations were trained for its purposes.[65]

Despite their rhetoric, free schools tended to fall back on the formulation of the progressive tradition - that their contribution to society would be to bring up children to be "emotionally free and well-balanced" [66]; if only schools could produce healthy individuals, then society's problems would be solved. What was lacking from the free school literature was any attempt to grapple with the question of the relationship between schooling and the economic life of society. Even under capitalism, life must go on, and so people must work to produce the necessities which sustain our existence. Radicals find this proposition difficult to cope with, the more so in the face of statements of this kind:

> If the non-competetive ethos of progressive education is allowed to dominate our schools, we shall produce a generation unable to maintain our standards of living when opposed by fierce rivalry from overseas competitors.[67]

If the economic life of society - production - is presented as necessarily a matter of competition and rivalry, it is easy to see why radicals wanted nothing to do with it. But ironically, by discouraging their pupils from participating in the 'rat race' (as they saw it) free

schools ran the risk of producing young people who were equipped to do nothing but the most menial jobs. And, of course, capitalism does have a certain requirement for such people.

It would be unfair to suggest that free schoolers were alone in not facing up to the question of the relationship between schooling and 'the world of work'. As G.D.H. Cole pointed out in 1952, this has long been a feature of the socialist movement:

> Technical education has always... attracted but little attention from the educational idealists... The cultural teachers who played a large part in framing Socialist educational policy were apt to look askance at any attempt to give schooling a vocational basis, because they thought of such attempts as meaning so much subtracted from 'culture' and alienated for the benefit of employers who, they felt, should see to the training of their workers in their own time [68].

'Technical' or 'vocational' training is, however, only part of the problem I am pointing to. There is the wider issue of bringing children to an understanding of the crucial role of production in sustaining human existence. This is a matter I will return to in chapter 8. All I wish to suggest here is that free schools (like many radicals and others) backed away from tackling the question 'what is to be the relationship between school and economic production?' [69]. My suspicion is that in doing so they deprived their schools of the chance of finding - and conveying to their children - a fundamental sense of real purpose. And, lacking such a sense of purpose, they found - to their chagrin - that they were encountering very similar problems to teachers in conventional schools: in a nutshell, children who 'didn't want to know'.

LIBERTARIAN NON-INTERVENTION

Central to free schooling is a libertarian theory that the best thing to do is to 'leave children to themselves'. We can state the theory in

this way: if children are given maximum freedom in a good environment, they will sooner or later create their own social order, discovering for themselves serviceable codes of behaviour and morality; and within this social order they will naturally engage in positive learning activities; and, having entered into these activities of their own volition, learning will be easy and effective.

This theory is predicated upon a belief in the 'natural goodness' of children:

> I believe that human nature is generally good, that human beings react generously to conditions of freedom and that therefore teachers doing experimental work in education would be wise not to try and "mould" children into some shape but to help them grow in freedom.[70]

Before continuing, we should note that there is a set of words much used by libertarians: 'freedom' and 'natural' are the most obvious, but 'interests', 'needs', 'spontaneous' and 'relevant' also occur commonly. Libertarians tend to make statements like "we want a type of school where the children would be free to develop naturally" [71]. The trouble is that each of these words represents an extremely difficult concept, as was sometimes acknowledged:

> Freedom is an abstract and terribly elusive word...[72]

and

> Natural is about the trickiest word in the philosophical vocabulary.[73]

It is not my intention to embark upon a philosophical analysis of these concepts [74], although I consider that such an analysis is needed [75]. I only want to point out that, used carelessly, these words do not strengthen the libertarian case but render it opaque or even meaningless. What, for example, does 'free to develop naturally' mean in a human social context?

Leaving such questions aside, the first tenet of libertarian non-interventionism is that children will, given freedom, create their own social order. When Tolstoy started his pioneering school at Yasnaya Polyana in the 1850s, he tried to conduct it on non-coercive lines. The immediate result was chaos. But gradually a new order began to emerge, Tolstoy reported, leading him to believe that:

> Left to themselves, children naturally feel a need for order and create it for themselves.[76]

This belief (which has obvious connections with the philosophy of Rousseau) became a highly influential libertarian axiom. In Britain it was proselytised by Homer Lane, taken up by A.S.Neill and adopted by, amongst others, Susan Isaacs:

> Then, gradually, and with occasional resurgences of mere wild disorder, the group began to take a definite social shape.[77]

The initial phase of disorder has been explained in this way:

> Most of them [the children] are so used to doing what they are told in school that it takes them quite a while to discover their own interests.[78]

Or, as Keith Paton put it:

> Because the children have been conditioned by authority structures, they interpret friendliness as weakness and start playing the teacher up.[79]

John Hipkin [80] takes this a little further by suggesting that the new order emerges out of commitment to the joint endeavour.

Now there is an alternative hypothesis as to what will happen if children are 'left to themselves'. William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* is often cited in this context. In this view, in so far as a new order emerges, it may be a brutal and repugnant order. In rejecting this view, libertarians point to a number of well known experiments - Yasnaya Polyana, the Little Commonwealth [81], Anton Makarenko's Gorki colony [82], Summerhill - where freedom is reported to have worked and

children have established for themselves a *just* social order. But as soon as we look at these experiments we see that what they all had in common was an adult who was a strong personality who knew what he wanted and was determined to get it. As Bruno Bettelheim observes of Neill:

> He does not realise that Summerhill works not because it is just the right setting in which to raise children, but because it is nothing but an extension of his personality. Everything about it expresses Neill. From the moment they come to Summerhill, children are enveloped by Neill, by what he stands for and what he lives for. Everywhere there is the powerful impact of his person, most of all his common decency. And sooner or later, most children come to identify with him, however reluctantly... Since the changes Neill produces in his children are based on identification, he succeeds only with those who can identify with him. And many can, because he is simply one of the grandest men around. But let a smaller person try to apply his naive philosophy, and chaos would follow.[83]

In another account of the unfolding process of giving children 'freedom', Carl Rogers says "It is important to have a clear understanding of the goals one is endeavouring to work towards"[84]. The 'one' Rogers refers to is the teacher, and in Rogers' account the whole process is firmly directed by the teacher. Likewise, Herbert Kohl's account of the process has this crucial passage:

> After the ten minutes I tried to bring the children back to work. They resisted, tested my determination. I am convinced that a failure of will at that moment would have been disastrous. It was necessary to compel the children to return to work, not due to my 'authority' or 'control' but because they were expected to honour the bargain.[85]

Despite Kohl's disavowals, it is clear that the children's freedom is conditional upon them sticking to the 'rules of the game' - the 'bargain' must be enforced by the adult.

What we find is that in none of the cases celebrated by libertarians as evidence that 'freedom works' were the children actually left to themselves. A.S.Neill is constantly self-contradictory about this. For example, in *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* he says:

> My view is that a child is innately wise and realistic. If left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far

> as he is capable of developing... Children need... freedom to be naturally good."[86]

But in the same book he tells this story:

> One day, on entering the playroom I found the children all clustered together at one end of the room. At the other end stood the little terror with a hammer in his hand. He was threatening to hit anyone who approached him.
>
> "Cut it out, my boy" I said sharply. "We aren't afraid of you."
>
> He dropped the hammer and rushed at me. He bit and kicked me.
>
> "Every time you hit or bite me," I said quietly, "I'll hit you back." And I did. Very soon he gave up the contest and rushed from the room.
>
> This was not punishment. It was a necessary lesson: learning that one cannot going around hurting others for one's own gratification.[87]

So much for leaving children to themselves. In fact it is hard to imagine any circumstances in which children, barring air crashes on south sea islands (in which all the crew perish but the children survive) or adoption by kindly wolves, *could* ever be left to themselves. Tolstoy himself wrote:

> The teacher... has had the possibility of bringing to bear all the force of his influence on the majority of pupils, on the society, always composed of the school children.[88]

It is clear then, that the libertarian experiments do not offer any evidence as to what children might do if 'left to themselves'. Instead, they involve powerful and gifted adults who influence children without (much) use of coercive techniques. There is no reason to object to the exercise of such gifts. But, as Bettelheim warned, those who try to emulate the successful experiments without possessing the necessary gifts may find themselves in difficulty. In the late 1960s and early 1970s there was an influx into teaching of young people full of libertarian ideals. They believed that if they gave their classes 'freedom' the children could be expected, after a certain phase of disorientation, to settle into a pattern of worthwhile self-directed

activity. One of the early purposes of *Libertarian Teacher* was to provide support for such teachers. Significantly, *Libertarian Teacher* did not publish a single account of this process working out successfully. It did, however, print stories of young teachers being driven out of schools.[89]

Of course, there are all kinds of reasons why the libertarian theory could not be expected to work out within conventional schools: at bottom, the environment was unsuitable. Free schools, however, tried to create an environment where the theory could be put into practice. In chapters 6 and 7 I will look at what happened at White Lion Street Free School, but in general there does not seem to be much evidence that the theory worked out in free schools either. Some free schools did have powerful and gifted adults who were able to influence children in the way described by Bettelheim. One visitor to Scotland Road observed the children running amok:

> The 'teacher' standing ankle deep in a sea of paper, reasoned and argued with them to stop, but with little impact. John Ord arrived and within a few minutes had quietly brought the fight to an end.[90]

But other free schools were ambivalent about whether it was right for adults to influence children this way (is it not 'manipulative'?) and even set up structures to prevent it: declaring, for example, that adults and children were 'equal' and discouraging any one adult from taking a leading role in the school. (It was the leading role of a *single* adult - Tolstoy, Lane, Makarenko, Neill - which gave the pioneering experiments their character).

I want to consider briefly two defences of the libertarian theory. One is that children should be granted freedom but *not* licence [91]. The distinction is an old one: it can be found in John Locke's

Treatises on Government and it was put forward by the great protagonist of progressive education Edmond Holmes [92]. But it is difficult to see what the distinction between freedom and licence amounts to. As Robin Barrow argues, the distinction

> ...is of no practical use because it is purely formal: it tells us that some freedoms are undeserved and should therefore be classified as licence and not granted. But it does not tell us which they are or how to recognise them.[93]

Licence describes an abuse of freedom, but it does not help us judge whether an action is an abuse of freedom or not. Neill tried to deal with this when he wrote:

> The test is always this: Is what Mr. X is doing really harmful to anyone else.[94]

But four pages later Neill contradicts this. Asked the question 'If a child is doing something dangerous, do you allow him to do it?' Neill replies:

> Of course not. People so often fail to understand that freedom for children does not mean being a fool. We do not allow our little children to decide when they shall go to bed. We guard them against dangers from machinery, automobiles, broken glass, or deep water.[95]

Neill now concedes that adults have a responsibility to make judgements as to which freedoms may be against the interests of children: where they judge that something (eg staying up late) is harmful to children, they do not allow it. This admits, then, the legitimacy of another test: 'Is what Mr. X is doing really harmful to himself?' With this the floodgates open.

In any case, it is clear that the judgement as to what is 'freedom' and what is 'licence' has to be made by responsible adults. But if adults are to be granted the power to make this judgement, and intervene on the basis of it, talk of 'leaving children to themselves' becomes a nonsense.

The second defence of the libertarian theory consists in declaring that of course the theory will not work with children who have been too badly damaged or 'poisoned' [96]. In this view a *Lord of the Flies* situation only shows how dreadful those children's previous experience must have been. The trouble with this defence is that it leads to a restatement of the theory along the lines of 'left to themselves, some children (those who have not been too badly damaged) will feel a need for order and create it for themselves.' But this makes it a quite vacuous theory, rather like saying 'all tall people are intelligent except for those who aren't'. Moreover, many free schools seemed (like all educational experiments [97]) to attract 'damaged' children, and the revised libertarian theory offers no guidance about how to work with them. Neill, in fact, became less and less willing to take on what he termed 'problem children', but free schools were reluctant to follow his lead in this respect.

When we examine the libertarian theory, the evidence which appears to support it falls away, and it dwindles to the belief that children are 'naturally good'. Like the opposing tenet of 'original sin' this is an article of faith which can never be proved or disproved.

The general point which I would like to draw out from this discussion is that free schools relied upon a theory which can be shown to be flawed. This is a matter I will return to in later chapters.

THE STRATEGY OF FREE SCHOOLING

As I noted at the start of this chapter, many radicals were sceptical about free schooling. In particular there were doubts about their part in a general strategy for change:

> If these alternatives are to contribute to a better social order, they must be part of a more general revolutionary movement - a movement which is not confined to schooling, but embraces all spheres of social life... What this requires is the development within the [free school] movement of an analysis which rejects any notion that schools are independent of society, an analysis which places schools concretely in their social and economic context.[98]

and

> ...the 'free school' movement is not so much an agency of social change as an example of social changes in society impinging on education from without. Assuming this is so for a moment, then it would appear that the 'free school' movement is a transitional, if not a transitory phenomenon, useful as a critique of the education system as it is at present, but without the power to provide either long-term solutions or the institutional framework for their enactment.[99]

Such charges did not disconcert every free schooler: some made no claim to be 'changing the world': they were merely getting on with what they wanted to do. They wanted to work with children, but they did not want to work in the restrictive environment of conventional schools. Some free schools - Freightliners for example - had the modest and specific aim of helping a small group of youngsters keep out of trouble.

But some free schoolers did consider themselves to be in the business of changing the world:

> The basic reason for starting a free school is that our western society, internally and in relation to the Third World, is grotesquely unjust and inhuman. This injustice is focussed in the schools, among other places, since they are one of its chief instruments.[100]

or

> ...free schools *do* point the way to a totally new society. Free schools reveal the authoritarian basis of society, and the way in which this is buttressed by fear and aggression. Free schools reveal that this basis for social and economic activity stunts and warps the development of humans, confining their horizons to the pillars that support the rat-race... If the principles upon which free schools are organised were carried on into the larger society, the growth of individuals and their opportunities for individual and communal development would be virtually unlimited.[101]

or

> ...the school will be in the vanguard of social change in the area.[102]

The free schoolers' strategy had two elements. First, they envisaged an ever-growing number of free schools taking more and more children away from the maintained sector until eventually conventional schools would become obsolete. And second, they wanted free schools to serve as models whose practice was so manifestly successful that other schools would be obliged to imitate them.

This strategy has been called 'prefigurative' [103]. It is characteristic of 'alternative society' politics: change is not sought by legislation nor by revolution but by encouraging people to start creating in the here-and-now the forms which the envisioned society will ultimately adopt. Other examples are the movement to replace the nuclear family by communal living, the replacement of 'junk food' diets by organic and 'natural' wholefoods, and the move towards the various alternative forms of medicine (homeopathy, osteopathy, acupuncture etc.).

As we now know, the free schoolers' ambitions were not realised. For a start, very few free schools were set up, and we have already seen the practical reasons for this. Even those free schools which were established closed - with one or two exceptions - before they could make much impact on public consciousness. And it has to be said that those free schools which did survive were not demonstrably successful in the way they needed to be if society was to "enforce the adoption of the free school idea by the state system".

But these are not the only reasons for the failure of the free school movement. The free schoolers' strategy lacked an understanding of why conventional schooling *is* as it is. It certainly grossly over-estimated the level of public dissatisfaction with orthodox schooling. The whole reason for the emergence of free schools was that free schoolers disagreed profoundly with what most people considered 'good education'. If most people thought of good schooling in terms of quiet orderly classrooms where a teacher, firmly in charge, teaches a traditional curriculum; where the ultimate objective is examination passses; and where conventional values are passed on to the rising generation; if this was most people's idea of 'good practice' why should they be driven to imitate a free school which "abolishes the concept of 'pupils' and 'staff' as two separate entities", where the traditional curriculum is rejected as 'irrelevant', where examination passes receive low priority, and where conventional values are flouted at every turn? And it is even less clear why the state should want to implement such reforms.

Free schools belong much more to the tradition of American radicalism than the English tradition. Almost without exception [104], American radical writing about education assumed that the only thing stopping schools from changing was that people - teachers, administrators, parents - hadn't yet heard the good news which radicals were bringing:

> It is not because of any inner depravity that educators follow such a self-defeating system. It is quite literally because they do not know any feasible alternative... It is in the hope of letting teachers know that it is not *necessary* to follow the conventional pattern that I am going to present three different examples... of new ways.[105]

Thus even when John Holt rather belatedly noted that American society contains rich people and poor people and that it might be in the interests of the former to keep it that way [106] he was still unable

to see that this might have significant implications for a strategy of educational change.

Whatever arguments may by summoned by free schoolers in support of their strategy, the history of the past 17 years has proved it to have been unsuccessful. But it does not follow from this that free schooling is, from a radical point of view, the wrong thing to do. If free schools have failed to change the face of British schooling (let alone British society) it is still possible to hold that they served a useful function. Firstly, they did offer the taste of an alternative education to a small number of children. The charge that free schooling diverted energy from the broader attempt to change schooling is barely sustainable, because the numbers of people involved were so small. Secondly, even if free schools were not demonstrably successful, they at least nourished the idea that it might be possible to go about schooling in a thoroughly different way. And thirdly, they offered a potential 'laboratory' in which radicals could put their theories to the hard test of practice. My opinion is that valuable lessons can be learned from the free schooling experiments, and this will be a theme of chapter 7.

What historians may wish to do is to consider free schooling as a phenomenon to be explained. That is not a task I can undertake here, but I suggest that any such explanation must lie within the context of the radical movement of the 1960s and 1970s as a whole. Our survey of that movement is now complete, and in the next chapter I will sketch out the lines of some of the debates which took place within the radical movement: debates which were not resolved and so remain, for radicals, dilemmas.

NOTES

1. We saw examples of this in earlier chapters, in Rank & File's 'U-turn' on democracy in schools (page 87), and in the SAU's belief that the reforms they sought could only be achieved in a socialist society (page 142). I will explore this question further in the next chapter (pages 239-240).

2. See, for example Di and Arthur Humphrey 'Schools - State, Free, None?' in *Libertarian Education* 10, page 7; Guy Neave 'The 'Free Schoolers'' in Douglas Holly (ed) *Education or Domination*; or Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *Schooling in Capitalist America* chapter 10.

3. Ivan Illich *After Deschooling, What?*

4. A.E. Jenning *The Struggle in Education* page 12.

5. See Michael P. Smith *The Libertarians and Education.*

6. See L.B. Pekin *Progressive Schools* pages 34-37.

7. See chapter 1, page 35 ff.

8. See W.A.C. Stewart *Progressives and Radicals in English Education* page 113.

9. See Michael P. Smith *op cit* page 60 ff.

10. See Bertram Edwards *The Burston School Strike.*

11. G.D.H. Cole 'Education and Politics: A Socialist View' in *Year Book of Education 1952* pages 42-63; and Ken Jones *Beyond Progressive Education.*

12. Maurice Ash *Who Are the Progressives Now?*

13. Eric Midwinter 'Stick with the System', *Times Educational Supplement* 19.11.71, page 2.

14. See Michael P. Smith *op cit.*

15. Peter Jenner 'The London Free School' in *Anarchy* 73, March 1967.

16. They were described in *Anarchy* 103, September 1969.

17. Kirkdale School in South London, which opened in 1965, has a claim to being the first British free school; but it did not call itself a 'free school' when it first started, and did not at that time come within the criteria of free schools I have listed - it was fee-paying and had two principals (albeit nominal). The founders of Kirkdale saw it as part of the independent progressive tradition. However, in the 1970s Kirkdale began to call itself Kirkdale Free School.

18. S.J.Curtis *History of Education in Great Britain* pages 43-45 discusses the old meanings of the term 'free school'.

19. Jeremy Bentham (edited by M.J.Smith and W.H.Burston) *Chrestomathia*.

20. *New Era* Vol 10 No 37, January 1929.

21. Childrens Rights Workshop *Newsletter* No 1, December 1974, page 3.

22. *The Guardian* 22 June 1971.

23. *Libertarian Teacher* 8, Spring 1972, claimed that there were "at least 30 Free School Projects". This claim is repeated in *Lib Ed* Vol 2 No 4, Spring 1987.

24. Allen Graubard *Free The Children* pages 40-41.

25. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *op cit* page 7.

26. For example Rob Grunsell *Born to be Invisible* and Roger White *Absent With Cause*.

27. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools: *Behavioural Units: A Survey of Special Units for Pupils with Behavioural Problems*.

28. Allen Graubard *op cit* page 42.

29. Which was not the case in America, as Jonathan Kozol angrily points out in *Free Schools*.

30. See Lucia Backett 'Street School' in David Head (ed) *Free Way to Learning*.

31. Nigel Wright 'Lesson for the People' in *Undercurrents* 36, October/November 1979, pages 31-32.

32. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *op cit* page 252. Bowles and Gintis go on to analyse this problem.

33. Interview with Phil Collins 9 September 1986.

34. Of the organisations mentioned in the last two chapters, only four showed consistent and active support for free schools - the A.S.Neill Trust, the Children's Rights Workshop, London Educational Alternatives Programme and Schools Without Walls. All were small organisations representing no great sector of public opinion. In the late 1970s the Advisory Centre for Education championed free schools after one of White Lion Street Free School's founders went to work there. In 1979 the Campaign For State Supported Alternative Schools took up the cause of free schooling (see note 38 below).

35. As White Lion's list of sponsors shows - see page 276.

36. Michael Young: 'Hackney Survey: Support for Alternatives' in *Where* 150, July/August 1979.

37. Nick Peacey 'Could it Happen Here?' in *Times Educational Supplement* 2.10.81.

38. The Campaign for State Supported Alternative Schools (CSSAS) arose out of a day conference organised by the Advisory Centre for Education in December 1978 on the subject of 'State Supported Alternatives in School-Age Education'. CSSAS published a policy document *A Case For Alternative Schools within the Maintained System* and a series of ten newsletters until 1984. An account of the thinking of CSSAS can be found in Laura Diamond 'State Supported Alternative Schools' in Clive Harber, Roland Meighan and Brian Roberts (eds) *Alternative Educational Futures*.

39. 'The Delta Free and Community School' in A.S.Neill Trust *Newsletter* 3, Christmas 1974.

40. See David Head (ed) *op cit* pages 75 and 139.

41. The choice of independent status by free schools dammed them in the eyes of many left-wingers since the independent sector is often associated with private schooling and privilege. In practice there was no alternative legal status for a school with five or more children. As White Lion Street Free School put it: "We do not relish this status, but it is the only legal status available to us until the Authority [ie the ILEA] agrees to fund the school. Ideally we would like to be an integral part of the maintained system. We will de-register as an independent school as soon as a viable alternative status can be arranged." (White Lion Street Free School *Why ILEA Should Not Fund the Free School (And Why it Should)* page 3). White Lion did de-register in 1982.

42. Jonathan Croall *Neill of Summerhill* page 338-341.

43. Allen Graubard *op cit* page 9.

44. Interview with John Ord 24 September 1986. See also Julia Backett *op cit.*

45. It was the same in American free schools: see John Holt *Freedom and Beyond* page 78-80.

46. Barrowfield Community School *Progress Report* (Aberdeen Peoples' Press 1975).

47. From preliminary brochure of the Leeds Free School and Community Trust. Between the draft and the printed version of this statement, a fourth section entitled 'A New Society' was ommitted. It said that free schools would point the way to "a totally new society".

48. The Scotland Road Free School *An Alternative School for Liverpool.*

49. Ibid.

50. Lucia Backett *op cit*; W. Kenneth Richmond *The Free School*; Maurice Punch in *The Guardian* 8 May 1973; for examples from North America see Allen Graubard *op cit* and Anne Long 'The New School - Vancouver' in Ronald and Beatrice Gross (eds) *Radical School Reform.*

51. This ditinction between 'them' and 'us' was explored by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* chapter 3.

52. See Colin and Mog Ball *Education for a Change* page 12 ff. Colin and Mog Ball talk of 'delegated functions' when the community delegates all its caring functions to professionals and institutions. (*Op cit* pages 44 and 61).

53. Scotland Road Free School *op cit* page 2.

54. As exemplified by Preston R. Wilcox 'The Community Centred School' in Ronald and Beatrice Gross (eds) *op cit*.

55. See Gastone Tassinari 'The 'Scuola and Quartiere' Movement: a Case Study' in Ian Lister (ed) *De-schooling*.

56. Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Chris Searle *This New Season*.

57. Colin and Mog Ball *op cit*; Stephen Kemmis, Peter Cole and Dahle Suggett *Towards the Socially-Critical School*; Wyn Williams and John Rennie 'Social Education' in David Rubinstein and Colin Stoneman (eds) *Education for Democracy*; and Douglas Barnes *From Communication to Curriculum*.

58. Margaret Mead 'Our Educational Emphases in Primitive Perspective' in *American Journal of Sociology* Vol 48. 1942-3, page 639.

59. "Nothing is more detrimental to the regular progress of the school than visitors" - Leo Tolstoy *Tolstoy on Education* page 228.

60. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin* 3, page 6.

61. Benson R. Snyder *The Hidden Curriculum*.

62. White Lion Street Free School *What Goes on at the Free School*. 1982 (not published).

63. Michael P. Smith *op cit* page 15.

64. It is still common to find courses in education divided into 'curriculum' and 'pedagogy'. Another component - 'organisation' is relegated to a marginal status, as if it were a matter of mechanics

that can be left to the adminstrators and the technically-minded. But mixed-ability grouping gives us an example of an 'organisational' question which has crucial implications for learning. Groupings are just one example of the structures which free schools were concerned with.

65. Ray Hemmings *Fifty Years of Freedom* page 173. Contrast Raymond Williams' viewpoint: "I agree, in principle, that a society has a right to make demands on its educational system". (Raymond Williams 'The Teaching Relationship: Both Sides of the Wall' in David Rubinstein and Colin Stoneman (eds) *op cit* page 220.)

66. Jules Townshend 'A.S.Neill: A Critical Appreciation' in *Rank & File* 28, page 7.

67. C.B.Cox and Rhodes Boyson *Black Paper 1975* page 1.

68. G.D.H.Cole *op cit* page 57.

69. The gradually expanding co-operative sector of the economy, fostered by organisations like the Industrial Common Ownership Movement, suggests one possible sector to which free schools might constructively have orientated themselves. Unfortunately this sector was miniscule in the early 1970s, with the exception of the 'Co-op' (Cooperative Wholesale Societies and Cooperative Retail Societies) which, in the opinion of many radicals, had lost touch with its radical origins.

70. R.F.Mackenzie *Escape from the Classroom* page 167.

71. David Head *Free Way to Learning* page 8.

72. George Dennison *The Lives of Children* page 7.

73. Allen Graubard *op cit* page 18.

74. Relevant work on this matter includes Leonard J.Waks 'Freedom and Desire in the Summerhill Philosophy of Education' in David Nyberg (ed) *The Philosophy of Open Education*; David Nyberg 'Ambiguity and Constraint in the 'Freedom' of Free Schools' in Kenneth A.Strike and Kieran Egan (eds) *Ethics and Educational Policy*; and Joel Feinberg 'The

Idea of a Free Man' in James F.Doyle (ed) *Educational Judgements.* Feinberg dispenses with the dual concept analysis - 'freedom from' and 'freedom to' - by proposing four categories of constraint: internal positive, internal negative, external positive and external negative. 75. In the field of education philosophical analysis had got itself a thoroughly bad reputation in the 1970s. (See, for example, David Adelstein 'The Wisdom and Wit of R.S.Peters' in Trevor Pateman (ed) *Counter Course* page 115 ff.) Its leading exponents - Richard Peters and Paul Hirst - had made the mistake of thinking that conceptual analysis could rise above value-judgements and social and political considerations. Peters has now belatedly acknowledged this: "Concepts cannot be dealt with in an abstract and isolated way. They have a social and historical context which must be taken into account and analysis of them must have a point related to some educational problem." (R.S.Peters 'Philosophy of Education' in Paul H. Hirst (ed) *Educational Thoery and Its Foundation Disciplines* page 44). What conceptual analysis *can* do is "make explicit the beliefs and assumptions implicit in the way we ordinarily talk" (I am grateful to Donald MacKinnon for this point: the quoted words are his). What conceptual analysis can *not* do is be prescriptive. Thus, for example, if I was able to demonstrate by conceptual analysis that 'natural' means wearing no clothes, it does not follow that the best thing to do is wear no clothes. (This does not follow even if I think that it is good to be natural and bad not to be). Conceptual analysis can only show us what 'natural' means as it is used in ordinary language (or, more precisely, the ordinary language of the social milieu from which the person doing the analysis comes). But of course, ordinary language can change - and does change - as any book on semantics shows.

Whatever the intentions of Peters and Hirst there is no doubt that the results of their conceptual analyses were widely taken to be

prescriptive. Thus Hirst's famous 'forms of knowledge' were taken to indicate what ought to be on the school curriculum. But in fact all Hirst had done was discover (by a rather long-winded method) what was already on the conventional curriculum.

Nevertheless, I suggest that radicals might wish to review their contempt for conceptual analysis.

76. Michael P. Smith *The Libertarians and Education* page 67.

77. Susan Isaacs *Social Development in Young Children* page 22.

78. Herbert Kohl *The Open Classroom* page 90.

79. Keith Paton *The Great Brain Robbery* page 21.

80. In Peter Buckman (ed) *Education Without Schools* page 87.

81. See E.T. Bazely *Homer Lane and the Little Commonwealth*, and W. David Wills *Homer Lane*.

82. Anton Makarenko *The Road to Life*.

83. Bruno Bettelheim in Nathan W. Ackerman and others *Summerhill: For and Against* page 104.

84. Carl Rogers *Freedom to Learn* page 17.

85. Herbert Kohl *The Open Classroom* page 119.

86. A.S. Neill *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* pages 4 and 118.

87. *Ibid* page 167.

88. Leo Tolstoy *Tolstoy on Education* page 233.

89. For a discussion of the experience of young libertarian teachers in conventional schools in the 1960s and 1970s see Mike Smith *The Underground and Education* pages 51-62.

90. Maurice Punch 'Free But Dead: Why?' in *The Teacher* 8 February 1974, page 3.

91. See A.S. Neill *Hearts Not Heads in the School* chapter 8.

92. Edmond Holmes *The Tragedy of Education* page 91.

93. Robin Barrow *Radical Education* page 87.

94. A.S. Neill Summerhill page 299.

95. *Ibid* page 303

96. See A.S. Neill *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* page 140. See also George Dennison *Lives of Children* page 108.

97. It is a striking fact about almost every pioneering venture in education that they attract a disproportionate number of 'problem' children. This was true of the projects of Froebel and Pestalozzi, and of Paul Robin at Cempius (see Michael P. Smith *op cit*); of the English experimental schools like Susan Isaacs' Malting House (see William van der Eyken and Barry Turner *Adventures in Education* page 270); of the independent progressive schools (for example, Bertrand Russell was worried that Beacon Hill was getting a disproportionate number of difficult children - see Ray Hemmings *Fifty Years of Freedom* page 80); of the libertarian boarding schools like Summerhill, Kilquahanity and Monkton Wyld; and of the free schools in both Britain and America.

The reason for this is probably that such schools are seen as a 'last resort' when conventional methods seem to have failed.

98. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *op cit* pages 246 and 351.

99. Guy Neave *op cit* page 242.

100. White Lion Street Free School internal document 1972.

101. Leeds Alternative Society *A Free School in Leeds*, a leaflet published c. 1972.

102. Scotland Road Free School *An Alternative School for Liverpool.*

103. See chapter 6, page 245.

104. The exceptions were Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *op cit* and the writings of Jules Henry.

105. Carl Rogers *Freedom to Learn* pages 5 and 9.

106. John Holt *Freedom and Beyond* chapters 9 and 10.

CHAPTER 5

RADICAL DILEMMAS

> The left is well known for its 'sects' and 'splits', which seem, from a distance, irrational, self-defeating. Yet issues of debate in society at large reproduce themselves even in the smallest and seemingly most homogeneous groupings, and it is therefore sometimes the most seemingly subtle differences that are the most decisive. Every left-wing group has its own left and right wings, every right-wing group has its; churches have their agnostic tendencies, atheists their spiritual; terrorists their humanitarians, charities their hardliners. Indeed, one might say that the whole spectrum of political opinions has a tendency to reproduce itself not only in each group *but in each individual.*[1]

In this chapter I will explore some of the debates which took place within the radical movement and which, on occasion, turned into open feuds. Whilst some radicals no doubt felt quite certain which side of the debate they were on, others were conscious of the pull of both sides. It is because these debates remained, and remain, unsettled in the minds of many radicals that I have chosen to call them *dilemmas*.

A. WHAT KIND OF REFORMS ARE NEEDED?

I referred in chapter 3 (pages 87ff) to the division between 'quantitists' and 'qualitists' as it emerged within the Rank & File teachers' group. Quantitists maintained that the radical changes which were needed in the field of education were a matter of access, resourcing, and better teaching:

> We want more education for more people, leading to more democracy... nearly all children could benefit from the quality of education at

present reserved for an elite at the public and grammar schools...[2]

This view tended to be held by those whose primary allegiance was to the working class movement:

> The hard evidence suggests that if we could open education as freely to working-class children as we have done to middle-class ones, we would double - and double again - our highly talented and highly educated groups.[3]

Qualitists rejoined that, with or without more resources and increased access, what was required was a radical rethinking of what education was for and how it should be done. For them, what happened to middle class children in public schools and grammar schools was no model for the kind of education they were seeking:

> It is time we stopped using the word 'education' honourifically. We must ask, education how? where? for what? and under whose administration?[4]

and

> The education system is irrelevant to our educational needs.[5]

and

> I attack the crazy idea of bottling up thirty kids in one classroom with a someone in charge.[6]

We can see clearly the quantitist position by considering this account in *Rank & File* of 'the crisis in education':

> A generation of expansion has come to an end, to be replaced by contraction into the indefinite future... teacher training colleges closed... school building stopped... teachers arbitrarily transferred... early retirement... salaries under attack... nursery expansion halted... supply and part-time teachers sacked... capitation allowances stretched... school meals cut back... new buildings empty... oversize classes... 20,000 teachers unemployed.[7]

We may ask whether this describes a crisis in *education* or a crisis in *the economy*. For qualitists, the 'crisis in education' had a very different meaning: it referred to a deep crisis of confidence about the aims, forms, methods and content of schooling.[8]

Qualitists held that "the story of education is the story of unexamined assumptions" [9]. In challenging the taken-for-granted understandings of 'education', 'learning', 'schools', 'school knowledge', 'teaching' and so forth, they considered that they were the true radicals. The quantitists regarded this as treachery - an attempt to rob working class children of the opportunity to have the good education which most radicals had themselves enjoyed [10]. Qualitists were, in the words of NUT General Secretary Edward Britton, 'educational quislings'.

It was left to the deschoolers to wonder aloud whether any nation could ever afford the level of resourcing envisaged by the quantitists:

> According to an educational law of eventually diminishing returns increased investment leads to increased failure and, in its turn, to arguments for yet more investment. This creates an exponential increase in the cost of failure. A developed country is one that can afford failure at the highest per capita cost.[11]

For revolutionary socialists, the demand for more resources was part of a strategy of exposing the inability of capitalism to meet basic social needs. Whether any imaginable socialist society would be able to provide the kind of resourcing demanded was a moot question.[12]

At the root of this debate lies at least one empirical question, which is why do so many working class children fail at school? Is it, as the Right to Learn group insisted, simply that they are not being given the provision which middle class children receive? Or is it to do with the way that 'success' and 'failure' are conventionally defined? This brings us to the second dilemma.

B. A CLASS ANALYSIS?

Closely related to the foregoing was a debate about the degree of emphasis which ought to be placed on social class in educational questions. Those radicals who gave primacy to a class analysis (Marxists, socialists and certain anarchists) regarded schooling as a systematic mystification by which the working class were purported to be offered a good education but were not. They considered the radical movement as an integral part of the struggle of the working class [13]. Other radicals - and this was particularly true of most American radicals - believed that the evils of schooling affected all children more-or-less equally. Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist argued that both were correct:

> ...there is a certain amount of confusion between the criticism of schools as teaching middle class values and as simply failing to teach effectively... Our legitimate criticism of schools is a compound of two distinct criticisms, the first a criticism of what school does to those who fail in it and second of what it does to those who succeed.[14]

There were certainly signs that middle and upper class children experienced their own schooling as oppressive. The school students' movement, at least in its early stages, attracted youngsters from grammar and public schools as much as from comprehensive and secondary modern schools. And we may take it that the kind of criticisms catalogued by Edward Blishen in *The School That I'd Like* came largely from middle class children [15]. And we should not forget that the radical movement itself was a middle class movement: it was not borne out of any indigenous working class resentment against schooling.

The issue was whether or not the education problem was part of the class problem. Similar issues have emerged with regard to racism and

sexism: are these a by-product of *class* society, or could we hazard the guess that even in a classless society there would be problems of sexism and racism to be tackled? The belief that the abolition of class society would in itself solve the problems of racism and sexism [16] is currently unfashionable on the British left. But, in the case of education, the view that the central problem of schooling is the problem of class remains, it seems, dominant on the left.

From the point of view of the history of ideas it is interesting to observe the ebb and flow of class analyses as the central preoccupation of progressives and radicals. In the post-1945 period the early works advocating a new look at schooling [17] hardly mentioned class as an issue. Although interest in class was revived as an educational issue in the early 1960s by historians and sociologists [18], the early publications and statements of the Libertarian Teachers' Association made no reference to the class question and even the first issues of *Rank & File* (1968 and 1969) made no suggestion that class might be an *educational* issue. It was not until the very end of the 1960s that class became a major concern of educational radicals. Up until that time, radicals had tended to take as their starting point not class but 'the youth rebellion':

> These youngsters are truculently questioning our whole civilisation: and our civilisation is not standing up very well to their questions.[19]

And from the mid-1970s class once more moved into the background (which is not to say that it was forgotten) as radicals made the issues of race and gender their primary concerns.

For radicals, class was not just a sociological concept for explaining social phenomena. British radicals were strongly influenced by the Marxist view that only the working class is capable of

overthrowing capitalism (and its attendant evils), and therefore the 'mobilisation of the working class' was fundamantal to their strategy. But there were alternative ideas of the motor force of social change. As we have seen, there were those who believed that it was *young* people who would transform the world: "Young people represent the most potent force for change in our society " [20] and, obviously, radicals who held this view had a particular reason for being interested in schools.

For the time being I will leave the question of class to one side. I will have more to say about it in chapter 8.

C. REFORM OR REVOLUTION?

In the 1980s, when revolutionary politics is not in vogue even amongst the young, it is easy to forget that for radicals of the late 1960s 'reform or revolution?' was a burning question. What was at issue was whether the social changes which radicals sought could be achieved through existing political structures and established institutions, or whether these would have to be swept away if radical changes were to be made. It was not only revolutionary socialists who eschewed 'reformism'; many anarchists did too, as well as sections of the non-Marxist left such as *Peace News* which declared itself (and still does) 'for non-violent revolution'.

Revolutionists [21] were actively involved in the radical education movement, particularly in Rank & File and the Schools Action Union. But when it came to educational debates it was never clarified what the implications of the revolutionist perspective were. It was hard to talk

about education without talking in terms of reforms, but reforms were precisely what revolutionists had ruled out:

> The objective is not to have better schools within capitalism, but how to re-construct education in a worker's state.[22]

An attitude taken by some revolutionists, which had the merit of simplicity, was that there was no point in proposing educational reforms until after the revolution because the fundamental constraint on education is the structure of prevailing social relations and "it is impossible to change the social relations of education without a workers state" [23]. Actually this view can be traced back to the 18th century (if not earlier):

> The art of forming men is in all countries so strictly connected with the form of government, that, perhaps, it is impossible to make any considerable change in public education, without making the same in the constitution of states.[24]

In this view any attempt to improve education under capitalism could only work to the advantage of capitalists [25]. Those involved in education could only agitate and organise as workers against their employers and link up with similar workers' struggles. Thus questions of 'education' became questions of teachers' salaries and conditions and so forth. The *Teachers Action* group held that pupils too were workers (albeit unwaged) and encouraged them to join the struggle. But since they did not have employers it was unclear who they were to struggle against. (There would seem to be a better analogy between school students and *unemployed* workers, and the left has always had had difficulty in specifying a clear role for the unemployed in the class struggle).

At a time when educational matters were being widely debated the 'wait till after the revolution' stance was hard to maintain and revolutionists were inevitably, if reluctantly, drawn into proposing reforms. The clearest example of this was the Rank & File proposals for

the democratisation of schools (see chapter 2). On the whole revolutionists, unable to develop a distinctively revolutionary strategy on educational matters (apart from the still-born idea of turning schools, colleges and universities into 'red bases'), were content to give their support to progressive reforms like comprehensive schooling, mixed-ability groupings and the abolition of corporal punishment. Even here, however, the fear of being labelled 'reformist' was evident, for example in the International Marxist Group's statement that it was opposed to corporal punishment, not because it was morally or educationally indefensible ('liberal' sentiments) but only because "it divides pupils and teachers" in their common struggle against capital [26].

The belief that the reforms thought desirable by radicals could not possibly be achieved within capitalism (this was the view of the Schools Action Union) is open to some doubt. As I mentioned in chapter 3, many radical reforms have been implemented in Finland in recent decades. There may, perhaps, be a darker side to revolutionism in the feeling that any reforms which improve the people's lot are a setback for the class struggle because they diminish people's inclination to struggle for the overthrow of capitalism: in this view 'better means worse'. If indeed revolutionists believe this, maybe they should say so.

Related to the 'reform or revolution?' debate was the question of how far and how fast it was right to go at any time. There were those who held that if you attempt to go 'too far too fast' you alienate potential sympathy and end up in an isolated position: the correct tactic is to make proposals which move in the right direction but which are capable of carrying popular opinion with them. Thus, for example,

the best tactic for supporting a teachers' pay claim is to propose infrequent half-day strikes rather than all-out strikes of indefinite duration. Characterising this view as 'gradualism' or 'Fabianism', opponents of it argued that gradual approaches are too easily negated, ignored, compromised or appropriated by the status quo [27] and can even be counter-productive. Such arguments were often invested with suspicions about the motivations of those taking the opposing view: perhaps the 'gradualists' don't *really* want there to be changes; perhaps the 'whole hog' brigade don't *really* care whether they succeed or fail. It is hard to see how such arguments might be resolved. From a radical point of view, further study of this question - taking evidence, for example, from history - may well be fruitful. It may be that the heady days of the 1960s gave radicals an unrealistic notion of the tempo of social change: if they didn't think that 'the world can be changed overnight', they did feel that it could be changed within a few years. Subsequent history has cast some doubt on this.

There was a similar sort of debate about whether the best tactic was a frontal assault on an objective or whether subtler forms of manouevre were more effective. Within schools, for example, groups of radical teachers debated whether it was better in staff meetings to attack the headteacher and his/her policies openly, or rather to try to win ground by making proposals which pretended to be only designed to further those policies.

One further matter to be discussed in connection with reforms and revolutions is the question of 'single-issue' campaigns. In chapter 2 I described the success of the Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment (STOPP) which campaigned assiduously for 20 years to achieve its objective. Revolutionists tended to spurn single-issue campaigns

except as vehicles for 'putting across' their political message (and, it must be said, as fishing-grounds for new recruits). Their view was that such campaigns deal with symptoms not causes: they don't address the 'root of the problem' which is the whole social and economic structure. John Holt called this the "General Staff mentality":

> ...it is like telling people trying to rescue a drowning man from a lake that their efforts turn us away from the real problem - the need to drain the lake so that no-one could drown in it. Even if true, so what? [28]

The educational radicals of the 1960s and 1970s launched relatively few single-issue campaigns: Teachers Against Racism, the Campaign to Impede Sex Stereotyping in the Young (CISSY), the Children's Rights Workshop campaign on children's books, the Ladbroke School affair [29], and STOPP were rare examples. There was a tendency, in fact, for groups to embrace broader and broader objectives as they went along. Thus the Schools Action Union started off with proposals for a limited number of reforms and ended up as a revolutionary party. Within the Rank & File group there was a divisive debate over a proposal that 'British Troops Out of Ireland' should become one of its major objectives. The thinking in favour of this was that Rank & File was well placed to bring the Irish question to the attention of British teachers as a whole. Opponents of the proposal argued that Rank & File wanted the support of teachers for its trade union and education policies regardless of whether they agreed that British troops should be withdrawn from Ireland. It does seem arithmetically likely that the greater the number of objectives a group has, the smaller the number of people who will agree with all of them. Had radicals been prepared to mount more single-issue campaigns they might have achieved much more than they did.

D. *HOW MUCH POLITICS?*

As we saw in chapter 3, the School Students' movement was invited in 1969 to choose between 'education with a little politics or politics with a little education'. This was a choice which the whole radical movement found difficult to make. Although, as I suggested in chapter 1, radicals could be distinguished from progressives by the greater stress they put on politics, the degree of stress varied. There was a strategic question at issue here: it was possible that a 'purely educational' stand could have a wider appeal than a radical political stand. This was brought out in an exchange in the columns of *Blackbored* which is worth quoting in full:

> Stoke on Trent, Staffs, 30 Nov 71
>
> Dear Comrades, As socialists in teacher training we were pleased to find that Blackbored existed with the aim of 'stimulating socialist ideas and practice in the world of teacher training'. Unfortunately, on reading Blackbored 3 we had to conclude that it would not help to achieve that aim.
>
> '"Socialist" is a loose term', says Blackbored 3. Very true. In fact the oppressive nature of our education system, which Blackbored opposes, has been perpetuated and reinforced by a party which calls itself socialist, the Labour party. Anyone who wants to fight *effectively* for socialism therefore has to be precise about what he means by the term. Otherwise he will end up wasting his efforts on the Labour party or some other blind alley.
>
> How precise is Blackbored about what it means by socialism? Not very. On page 14 of No 3 we read that 'the Union of Liberal Students' Executive fully supports the objectives of Blackbored'. Now the Liberal Party is a party openly committed to the preservation of the present system of production for profit. It does not support the independent action of the working class to overthrow the system and bring about rational planning of production for human needs. But this concept of the working class liberating itself is for us the heart of socialism. The list of basic beliefs on page 2 of Blackbored 3 confines itself to condemning a few particular features of the present educational system. It does not seek to find the root causes behind those features and point out the basic outline of how to fight them. This means that Blackbored is no more socialist than the Labour party or Liberal party.
>
> We realise that socialists cannot simply ram their ideas down people's throats and say Take it or leave it. There is nothing wrong in a socialist magazine including non-socialist articles - so long as there is a clear socialist editorial line. But with Blackbored as it actually is, the effect is that the issues in education are

simply posed as 'progressives', 'liberals' and 'socialists' on one side versus 'authoritarians' on the other. We believe that much of 'progressive' education is simply a more insidious method of reproducing the aims of authoritarian education - eg, as Dave Lee (approvingly!) puts it on page 13, to 'push the kids to give of their best' - to give of their best to the capitalist system.

For us it is a basic principle of socialism not to fear to state what is. That is why we cannot consider Blackbored to be a socialist magazine.[30]

This was followed immediately by this reply from one of *Blackbored*'s editors:

It would no doubt have been easy to fill the pages of Blackbored with statements like 'only the independent action of the working class can overthrow the present system and bring about rational planning of production for human needs' - which I agree with, though, perhaps unlike the Staffs correspondents, I include teachers in the working class (okay, they haven't got their hands on the machines, but they've got them on the ideology, which is, in a sense, also vulnerable). But what impact would this bald formula have on those many *potential* socialists whose most urgent worries right now are about things like teaching practice, the dictatorship of headmasters, the difficulty of getting across to working class kids in the classroom, the intolerable tensions of school, the petty restrictions and mystifying lectures of college?

What is lacking from the Staffs comrades position is a sense of imaginative involvement with the particular problems and experiences which preoccupy students and young teachers. Why is it that in college after college Blackbored sells scores of copies, frequently 50 or 100, while the resident 'official' socialists can be counted on the fingers of one hand - and frequently say 'Oh, you won't sell many here'? Why is it that many of the most militant people, people who are desperately concerned to undertsand why they feel dissatisfied with their education or frustrated in their jobs, are not aware of how close they are to socialism, and regard the committed socialists in their own colleges or staff rooms as cranks? Why is it that some of the most committed socialists who find themselves in colleges and schools are 'above' the local issues seething around them - or dormant around them but nonetheless potent - and will settle for nothing less than the Great Struggle of the Industrial Masses? Certainly the industrial struggle is the core of the matter, but it is necessary to re-create socialism from within one's immediate community not merely recognise it somewhere else. Wherever it is we're going, we can only get there through our own experience, however much we seek to widen it to join with others'. If we try to bypass it, we will lose whatever motivation towards socialism we originally had, and become mechanical agents of someone *else*'s ideas, which we will no longer be fit to evaluate.

Many articles in Blackbored have drawn a distinction between liberal-progressive and socialist tendencies in education. But this distinction has been *exploratory*. The question of how socialist principles should be applied in education has not by any means been solved yet. I have not come across any hallowed text by Marx on the dialectic of Teaching Practice. The comrades mention but do not grapple with the problem raised by Dave Lee's exhortation to 'push

> kids to give of their best'. What *is* the socialist answer to the problems of teaching *now*? More permissiveness surely isn't it. Neither can we afford to wait till the workers' revolution delivers us before trying to do anything ourselves.
>
> Contrary to what the Staffs comrades seem to think, the main issue confronting us is not whether Blackbored is a socialist magazine; it is what is socialism itself as applied in a particular context and time. One thing it certainly isn't, is a schematic formula brought to people like a gospel instead of arising from their own experience and concerns.[31]

The two sides of this debate are clearly set out here, and there is no need for me to elaborate them. We might note, however, that this debate foreshadowed the debate within the Labour Party after its election defeats in the 1980s.

A political distinction which may be relevant here is that made by Wini Breines between 'strategic' politics and 'prefigurative' politics [32]. 'Strategic' politics is concerned with "building organisation in order to achieve power so that structural changes in the political, economic and social orders might be achieved" [33]. 'Prefigurative' politics, by contrast, seeks "to create and sustain within the live practice of the movement, relationships and political forms that "prefigure" and embody the desired society" [34]. Breines argues that prefigurative politics was characteristic of the new left in the United States in the 1960s, and that this marked it out from the 'old left'. In Britain it was variably so. Whilst most of the radical education groups were prefigurative in the sense that that they adopted collective (as opposed to hierarchical) forms of organisation, some did think in terms of 'winning power' which is a characteristically 'strategic' aim.

I suggest that this is potentially a more fruitful means of analysing the political differences within the radical movement than the old

categories 'left', 'right', 'anarchist', 'socialist' and so forth. And, as I have argued elsewhere, many of the 'political' differences within the radical movement owed as much to personal and temperamental divergences as to real political distinctions between the positions of the protagonists [35]. For example, in the case of the *Blackbored* debate we have just considered, it seems likely that the Staffordshire correspondents were people who were somewhat inclined to *talk at* people whereas *Blackbored*'s respondent found it easier to *listen* to what other people had to say. We might even hypothesise that this would be reflected in their teaching styles in the classroom - the one inclined to 'lecture', the other perhaps preferring 'discovery methods'.

E. *THE ROLE OF THE STATE*

I referred in chapter 1 (pages 36-37) to the tension within the progressive movement between the independent progressive schools and progressives within the state sector. This tension was replicated within the radical movement: there were those who considered it imperative to work 'within the system' - that is, within state schools - and others who felt that this was futile. The first view was exemplified by *Teaching London Kids* or Rank & File, the second by the free schools. The debate took place on two levels, one a practical level, the other theoretical.

On a practical level, radicals observed and catalogued the constraints placed upon them in state schools. Some believed that there was sufficient room for manoeuvre (in some schools at least) for radicals to operate fruitfully inside state schools, that the much vaunted autonomy of British schools would permit real latitude. But

others felt that such attempts were too easily blocked, compromised, negated or co-opted. In fact most radicals did work in state schools, although it is hard to assess (it would be a major research undertaking) how successful they were in offering children significantly different educational experiences. It was a sense of disillusionment with the possibilities at a practical level which drove some radicals into free schooling and other ventures 'outside the system'.

On a theoretical level, there was a debate about whether the constraints which radicals experienced within state schools were a necessary concomitant of *state* control of schooling. The simplistic view that the state somehow controls what goes on in schools with an iron hand:

> The teacher becomes the functionary of state power, imbuing the children with state-licensed knowledge and ideology. [36]

was countered by an argument that things are more complicated:

> ...educational development is an untidy series of temporary accomodations between conflicting economic and political interests. [37]

and

> ...though the school system has effectively served the interests of profit and political stability, it has hardly been a finely tuned instrument of manipulation in the hands of socially dominant groups. [38]

The belief that there is an 'iron hand' which blocks radical developments in state schools required an explanation of the precise mechanisms by which it operated. As radicals began to develop theories about such mechanisms (the most promising of which were theories about knowledge and ideology [39]) it began to seem possible that these mechanisms would operate quite as much 'outside the system' (for example, in free schools) as within state schools.

The fate of the radical teachers of William Tyndale school, as well as of radical headteachers like Robert Mackenzie and Michael Duane [40], did seem to demonstrate severe limits on the scope for radicalism in the state sector. But it might be argued that what these 'victims' had in common was a lack of discretion and tactical subtlety in their dealings with the authorities and other hostile groups. (Perhaps, for example, they tried to go 'too far, too fast'). There were other cases - for example the successful defence by Countesthorpe College against its critics - which indicated that battles *could* be won within the state sector [41].

For Marxists, the issue hinged round their analysis of the state, with Engels' *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* and Lenin's *The State and Revolution* often cited. An interesting, if inconclusive, debate took place in the columns of *Rank & File* about the interpretation of these texts and their implications for state schooling [42]. The question which remained unresolved was whether or not the state is necessarily inimical to forms of education which further independent working class struggle.

The fact that most radicals chose to work inside the state sector should not be taken as an indication that they had settled these theoretical debates in their own minds. It was much more a practical matter, a matter of money: radicals have to earn a living. Even the best organised ventures found it difficult to raise the money to work outside the state sector: their existence was precarious and usually short. And we should not forget that the voluntary sector relies to a considerable extent on state funding (for example, White Lion Street Free School could not have managed without considerable grants from the London Borough of Islington). As the 1970s progressed the left became

more convinced that *local* government did offer scope for radical programmes - hence the influx of left-wingers onto local councils. Clearly 'the state' was less monolithic than some had believed. Some would argue that this was merely a loophole which Mrs. Thatcher's governments have been eager to close - witness the abolition of the Greater London Council which had been granting large sums of money to numerous radical projects, many of which had an educational purpose in an informal sense.

The question of whether or not to work 'within the system' was faced in sharp form by White Lion Street Free School in 1982 when the Inner London Education Authority agreed to take the school over. (White Lion's founders were divided over whether or not to accept the offer). For the previous ten years White Lion had been an independent school. A careful analysis of White Lion's experience, comparing its independent days with its state days, could yield valuable empirical evidence as to the kind of constraints which result from being part of the state sector. This is a research project which remains to be undertaken.

F. *SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND CAUSALITY*

Radical writings about education can be divided into those which posit immediate causal relationships between observed phenomena and, on the other hand, those which look for a root (and possibly hidden) cause to which the observed phenomena may be related As an example of the former, consider this statement of John Holt's:

> The family even as most people knew it in this country a hundred years ago has been almost entirely destroyed, mostly by the automobile and the restless and rootless society it has helped to create.[43]

Holt points here to two phenomena: (a) the rise of the automobile, and (b) changes in family life over the past 100 years. He says that (b) was caused (mostly) by (a). This kind of causal linking of two phenomena is common in Holt's writings. To give another example, he visited many schools and observed (a) bad teaching, and (b) children failing to learn effectively. He claimed (at least in his early books) that (a) causes (b) [44].

Now there is an alternative approach to this question of causality. Instead of saying that (a) causes (b), we could look for a third factor (c) which is the underlying cause of (a) and (b). In the first example, we might suggest that this underlying cause (c) is the changing nature of industrial production associated with changes in technology. This can be viewed as an historical (and continuing) process which began with the industrial revolution. Development of new technologies led to the development of large factories and required the bringing together of large numbers of people in cities. This had its impact on traditional family and community patterns and created a need for methods of mass transportation (themselves made possible by technological developments).

A good example of the approach which seeks explanations in the social structure is Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis's book *Schooling in Capitalist America*. In that book, Bowles and Gintis tried to show how features of schooling are related to the requirements of capitalist production, and how changes in the nature of capitalist production lead to changes in schooling.

Why do so many children fail at school? Holt's answer is that teachers haven't given enough thought to what they are doing. Bowles

and Gintis offer a quite different answer: capitalist production requires a stratified labour force and therefore schools are required to stratify their pupils, labelling some 'successful' and others 'failures'. In the face of this requirement the ordinary teacher is quite powerless. But how does capitalism get teachers, most of whom are benevolent people who would dearly love *all* their pupils to succeed, to collaborate in this process? A social structure explanation would point to mechanisms like the examination system, or to an ideology which sustains the belief that some children are 'able' and others aren't, so that teachers resign themselves reluctantly to the 'fact' that some children will do well and others won't. (This ideology may well include 'scientific' notions of inherited intelligence or sociological notions of cultural deprivation).

Analyses which relate phenomena to the social structure can offer new depth to our understanding of education. There are, however, three dangers that I want to point to briefly. The first is that whilst some phenomena may have a structural explanation, it does not follow that everything does. For example, it was quite common in the 1960s and 1970s in certain left-wing circles to blame virtually *everything* on to capitalism: men batter their wives because of capitalism, children have rotten teeth because of capitalism, and so on. One of the sobering experiences of free schools (as we shall see in the next chapters) was that this over-extension of structural explanations was exposed as an all-too-easy excuse for people's own shortcomings and the shortcomings of their ideas. An over-emphasis on structural explanations can lead people to forget (or deny) their responsibility for their own actions.

Secondly, there is the danger of *determinism*: structural explanations can begin to make things look inevitable. If schools are as they are

because capitalism requires them to be like this, then it appears that there is nothing we can do about it unless we abolish capitalism. People become merely powerless cogs in the capitalist machine. But the fact that there are significant variations in daily life - some schools have mixed-ability groupings, for example, whilst others are streamed; some parents bring their children up in a libertarian way, whilst others don't - suggests that things are far from inevitably determined by hidden structural forces. Structural forces are merely that: forces. But human beings are capable of acting to resist such forces.

Thirdly, there is the danger of *reductionism*, in particular of economic reductionism. Certain Marxists tend to trace the explanation for every phenomenon to an *economic* explanation. For example, Rank & File noted in 1977 that there was at that time "a generalised attack on 'progressive' methods", citing the William Tyndale affair and James Callaghan's 'back to the basics' call in his 1976 Ruskin College speech. Rank & File explained this as follows:

> The whole thing hinges, as far as the government and ruling class is concerned, upon the need for education cuts.

and went on to claim that

> The development of education, in the broadest sense, is determined under the 'economics of scarcity' of the capitalist system, and in a largely negative sense, by 'economics'. So the future shape of education in this country is being determined by the need for cuts... [45]

This reduction of educational questions to a question of economics, and, specifically, the perception that the fight against the backlash in education was a matter of 'fighting the cuts', could be found over and over again in the publications of the Rank & File group, the Socialist Teachers' Alliance, the Schools Action Union and in *Teachers Action*. It is worth noting that it is unlikely that Marx himself would have gone along with them:

> Marx and Engels repeatedly denied that economic conditions and demands, although 'in the last instance' primary, should be seen as the *only* historical driving forces; they denied that *every* historical movement, *every* political event, *every* philosophical idea must be directly and exclusively ascribed to economic processes.[46]

As Michael Apple has put it:

> It has become clear that any successful interpretation of how schooling is related to the economic, political and cultural spheres of our society must avoid economic reductionism and will be exceptionally complicated. This relationship cannot be completely caught by any theory that posits a one-to-one correspondence between what happens in schools and the needs of dominant class and gender groups.[47]

G. *DEGREES OF LIBERTARIANISM*

The division in the radical movement was not between libertarianism and its antithesis (whatever we may call that), for the mood of the times was pervasively anti-authoritarian. All radicals favoured some relaxation of the traditional discipline and authority structures of schools. There was, however, a division between those who believed in maximum freedom for children (with Summerhill as the prototype) and those who, whilst favouring a relaxed 'open classroom', felt that the teacher must ultimately be in control of the educational process.

Although some might portray this as a division between 'anarchists' and 'socialists', that would not fit the facts. A.S.Neill was not an anarchist and indeed during the 1930s Summerhill had many communist supporters [48]. Of course much depends upon how one defines 'anarchist' and 'socialist' - matters of incessant debate amongst anarchists and socialists themselves. It is arguable that the distinction between 'libertarian' and 'authoritarian' is primarily a matter of personality and temperament - a psychological matter,

although the social formation of personality may well have a political dimension [49].

The debate within the radical movement was not just about how much libertarianism was desirable in principle (in an 'ideal world') but what was the right practical approach in the present circumstances. All radicals accepted, to a greater or lesser extent, the thesis that schooling induces children to accept the prevailing ideology and 'lived ideology' [50] The question was, how should radical teachers respond to this? Some held that to give children maximum 'freedom' would be to leave them hopelessly vulnerable to the prevailing ideology: what was needed instead was a sytematic attempt to present children with 'the other side of the story':

> I discounted the myth that the teacher must be the objective observer whose political and class allegiances are invisible to the children... Some knowledge has a priority for assimilation: the knowledge of resistance to, and organisation against exploitation and subjection, and contact and empathy with the oppressed of the world, whether in your own street or lands or oceans away.[51]

Others responded that this was to go from the frying pan into the fire: it was merely a new form of indoctrination [52]. Then again, there was the view, once expressed by Margaret Mead, that:

> Attempts to teach children any set of ideas in which one believes have become tainted with suspicion of power and self-interest, until almost all education can be branded and dismissed as one sort of indoctrination or another.[53]

I will not attempt to disentangle the complex issues raised here. But if we leave aside the difficult questions of 'ideology' and 'indoctrination', there is still a dilemma between 'interventionism' and 'non-interventionism' [54]. It is a question of the teacher's role and, more generally, of the relationships between adults and children [55]. Because it was a dilemma faced immediately by free schools, I will explore it further in the next two chapters.

H. *SEEING THINGS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE CHILD*

> ...the main reason why there are two sides in education is not that there are two theories, but that some people follow theories and other people follow children.[56]

In the radical literature there is a *prima facie* distinction to be made between those writers who write about children (Neill, Holt, Kozol, Dennison, Kohl, Mackenzie for example) and those who write about teachers or education (Goodman, Postman and Weingartner, Holly, Illich for example). The former make real efforts to see things 'from the point of view of the child'. They describe children, quote their words and try to articulate the thoughts and feelings which children have about schooling. Their concern is that children should not be acted upon: they should not be thought of as clay to be modelled or plants to be tended. In Neill's opinion ordinary schooling is "wrong because it is based on an adult conception of what a child should be and of how a child should learn." [57]

The other set of writers, and almost all writers of educational theory, discuss questions of education from 'an adult perspective', without any necessary reference to the thoughts and feelings of children. Their concern is to develop a proper understanding of the educational process in society. It is not that they don't care about children, but they are, as it were, architects who want to solve problems of design and construction before moving people into the building. It is a danger of this approach that children come to be thought of as material to be dealt with. As the School of Barbiana students expressed it, with heavy irony:

> A university professor of education doesn't have to look at schoolboys. He knows them by heart, the way we know our multiplication tables.[58]

Certainly most of the radical literature in Britain was written by teachers preoccupied with the problems of teachers who seemed to assume that what was good for teachers would necessarily be good for children. This was criticised by a correspondent to *Radical Education*:

> ...you mention the people who *have* to go to school only once... You write of 'an increasing militancy among teachers' without relating it at all to the increasing militancy among their students... You write of 'the revolt against the educational system of today' without mentioning the school students who are in the vanguard of that revolt... it seems possible that you regard the very students who totally reject school (who really *are* in revolt) as among your adversaries...[59]

In fact school students' voices could be heard in this period (see chapter 3). Perhaps their most cogently argued statement was the book *Letter to a Teacher* by students of the School of Barbiana in Italy. These students took what I have called the 'quantitist' view in that they accepted the orthodox goals of education but criticised the means which they found inefficient and unfair. They offered a very different idea of 'what children want' from that presented by the radical writers who claimed to be representing the 'point of view of the child'. For example "You say that boys hate school and love play. You never asked us peasants."[60] They mocked the creed of the free development of the personality [61] and declaimed "A student who gives personal opinions on things beyond his reach is an imbecile. He should not be praised for it. One goes to school to listen to the teachers."[62]

Of course, there is no reason to presume that the Barbiana students were speaking on behalf of all children, any more than the Schools Action Union in Britain was. Doubtless there is as great a range of opinion about education amongst children as there is amongst the adult population. We should perhaps we wary, then, of talking of *the* point of view of *the* child.

The dichotomy is not, as Leila Berg would have it, between those who follow 'theories' and those who follow 'children', but between theories based upon observation of, and knowledge of, real children, and those which are not. (I say *real* children because I know one Professor of Education who gets his knowledge of children from watching *Grange Hill* on television). This is why Froebel was such an important pioneer, and why the studies of Jean Paiget were so valuable, and why John Holt's first two books, *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn* were so perceptive. Of the radical magazines surveyed in chapters 2 and 3, only *Childrens Rights* stands out as drawing on this observation of children.

At a general level, we can make a distinction between teachers (and adults in general) who listen to what children say and take notice of it, and those who do not. Even the most interventionist of the radicals (such as the Right to Learn Group) favoured the former. The real argument amongst radicals was how far children *alone* can be allowed to dictate the course of their education, and how far it is possible. It is a matter I will return to in the next two chapters.

I. *SCHOOLERS AND DESCHOOLERS*

Opposition to compulsory schooling was expressed throughout the 1960s [63] but it was not until Everett Reimer's *School Is Dead* and Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* were published in 1971 that deschooling became a widely discussed issue. These books called forth a number of responses [64] but were quite summarily dismissed in radical publications [65]. It is possible to argue that since most active radicals were teachers, deschooling was against their interests. One might also wonder whether radical educationists found the prospect of

the abolition of schools unattractive because they would no longer have anything to grumble about [66].

We looked at deschooling briefly in chapter 3, and I will not add to that here beyond suggesting that the chief effect of the deschooling proposals was to confuse the radical movement and thereby sap some of the energy which had previously gone into the advocacy of school reform.

J. *'IDEALISM' AND 'REALISM'*

In chapter 1 I referred to the 'idealism' of radicals, defining the word as a vision of how things ought to be [67]. A number of tensions within the radical movement arose from this, and a good example is provided by Rhiannon Evans talking about differences of opinion which arose at Brighton Free School:

> Only two of us had taught at all. That in itself was a cause of factions because constantly you had experience pitted against idealism. And some of the stronger personalities were people without teaching experience at all. In fact they were from public schools: there were two of them, and I think there was a feeling they didn't have any understanding of the state system, they didn't have any understanding really of how kids have difficulties. They were some of the people who were most idealistic about structure - they felt it should be completely free, there should be no structure at all. They saw us as wishy-washy liberals, as selling out the principles and ideals which had arisen collectively but which had really come out of fairly minimal experience.[68]

Evans poses the dilemma here as one between 'idealism' and 'experience'. If our idealism tells us what *ought* to be done, our experience tells us what *can* be done under given circumstances. It seemed to be common for radical practitioners to experience frustration at the idealistic advice which non-practitioners offered them and, when

they did not heed the advice, find themselves accused of 'selling out' on fundamental principles. This kind of thing is not, of course, unique to radicals. There is perhaps a universal tendency for people who have to do a job to be proffered not-always-welcome advice from those who don't have to do the job. But the radical movement was probably unusual in having a high proportion of people who preferred to give advice rather than do the job themselves.

There is a view (and this is related to the philosophical theory of 'idealism') that principles *precede* experience. This view sees one's principles as fixed, as unassailable axioms: what one must do is shape one's practice to conform to the principles. An alternative view would be that one's principles are formed by the (dialectical) inter-action of ideas and experience. I might, for example, formulate the principle that it is wrong to kill living things; but then, on reflection, I might realise that this would make it impossible to eat (even vegetables are living things). I might therefore reformulate the principle to exclude plants. Then I might discover that every time I walk I crush numerous tiny animals under my feet. I might then vow always to walk six inches above the ground. Experience would quickly teach that this is impossible, and I would be forced to a further re-statement of the principle along the lines of 'it is wrong to kill living things except when it is unavoidable'. At which the little voice which propounded the original principle yells 'sell-out!' And certainly 'except when it is unavoidable' opens the floodgates to all kinds of abuses.

At work here is a characteristically radical desire to establish watertight principles, principles which divide things into 'black' and 'white' and which permit no muddy grey areas which can become the 'thin

end of the wedge'. For radicals, operating in the world as it is (and not as they would wish it to be) poses conflicts and doubts which they found difficult to handle. Whether it is right to make compromises and accomodations, and how far to do so, remains a major radical dilemma.

K. *THE PLACE OF REASON*

As Brian Simon points out [69], an emphasis on rationalism ("an attitude that seeks to solve as many problems as possible by an appeal to reason" [70]) has been a characteristic of the radical tradition in British education. It was also a feature of the European libertarian tradition [71]. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, radicals began to depart from this emphasis. First, there was a complaint that schooling was concerned exclusively with the cognitive domain - a complaint A.S.Neill had made in 1945 in his book *Hearts Not Heads in the School*. Pleas were made for the recognition of the proper place of fantasy and feelings in education [72].

But there was also a wider view that rationalism was a sort of straightjacket:

> ...it is part of the process of subjection that our feelings are made to appear untrustworthy and can only be regarded seriously if they are uncontradicted by logic and if they are verified by empirical evidence.[73]

Rationalism, it was suggested, is only one way (and a characteristically Western way) of understanding the world [74], and it is inadequate on three counts. One, reason is insufficient to comprehend the great cosmic forces - the human soul, the spiritual, the supernatural. Two, rationalism disregards the part that the emotions, and the unconscious, play in human life. Three, rationalism overlooks

the fact that the human being is an *animal* in an environment: rationalism under-rates the physical, instinctual and the spontaneous (as opposed to thought-out) forces within us. Those who held this view feared that rationalism - especially its epitome, western science - was endangering the future of life on this planet, as well as leading away from an understanding of human existence:

> ...the ever-growing reliance upon objective criteria of thought [has] been paid for by an ever deepening ignorance of the real nature of human existence.[75]

And there was a further argument that our conception of 'rationality' is itself a social construction and must therefore be considered as problematic: as Michael Young put it "Today it is the commonsense conceptions of 'the scientific' and the 'rational' that represent the dominant legitimizing categories" [76] and he went on to suggest that questioning these taken-for-granted categories is a necessary preliminary to conceiving of alternatives.

Before going further, we might note that I have expressed all these objections to rationalism in rational terms: they are rational objections. This is because the medium by which the objections are being expressed - using words, in writing, in a non-fictional format - is essentially a rationalist medium. The difficulty is that non-rational (by which I do not mean irrational) statements are too easily discounted in the literature which dominates educational debate. In the broader radical movement of the 1960s and 1970s non-rational modes of expression were abundantly used - music, dance, drama, art, for example - as well as non-rational means of exploring experience - for instance mysticism or drugs. But it may be a measure of the hold that rationalism has on education that such non-rational modes were rarely found within the radical *education* movement. It is, in fact, hard to see how an appreciation of the non-rational could make inroads into the

adult world of education, given that those who inhabit it are selected precisely for their commitment to rationalism. (Imagine the members of Pink Floyd applying for lectureships in education on the basis of their album *The Wall*: "We don't want no education, teachers leave us kids alone...", even though some might contend that Pink Floyd have a better understanding of how working class children feel about schooling than some lecturers).

It is common for non-rational statements, when they are perceived as damaging, to be described as 'mindless'. Thus if a group of children express what they feel about their school by burning it down, their action may be called 'mindless'. Certain sociologists (within the field of deviance) have attempted to explain such statements by showing that they do have a 'rationale' [77]. This approach seems to assume that non-rational expressions can be translated into rational terms. I recall reading that there was once a fashion for 'explaining' pieces of music in rational terms: "In the first movement of his fifth symphony, Beethoven is saying...". For my own part, I remain sceptical of attempts to subsume non-rationalism within rationalism.

But equally, I cannot accept that there is any necessary contradiction between reason on the one hand and the non-rational (emotion, the unconscious, the body, instinct, the spiritual) on the other. Indeed, I believe it could be argued that it is *ir*rational to disregard these dimensions of human experience, (just as I believe that the destruction of our planet would be, not the apotheosis of rationalism, but of irrationalism.) To put it another way, I think it would be possible to mount a rational defence of the non-rational. But it would be another matter to get this accepted in the academic world,

where current notions of 'academic propriety' virtually rule out all forms of non-rational expression.

If there are dangers in ignoring the non-rational dimension of human experience (and I think it is fair to say that the majority of educational radicals were hardly more conscious of these dangers than 'the world of education' in general), there is equal danger in going to the other extreme of dismissing rationality. Rational thought is also part of human experience. What is needed is a proper acknowledgement of each dimension: a balance, if not a synthesis. It seems probable that the reconciliation of the rational and the non-rational would require great changes in the way we lead our lives and the way we organise our society [78]. But the search for reconciliation must, I believe, be conducted within the context of our civilisation. The dangers of abandoning the predicate of rationalism upon which our civilisation is based were pointed out by Bertrand Russell:

> Rationality, in the sense of an appeal to a universal and impersonal standard of truth, is of supreme importance... not only in ages in which it easily prevails, but also, and even more so, in those less fortunate times in which it is despised and rejected as the vain dream of men who lack the virility to kill where they cannot agree.[79]

And yet, there is a further danger: in Margaret Mead's words:

> We have no way of knowing how often in the course of human history the idea of Truth, as a revelation to or possession of some group (which thereby gained the right to consider itself superior to all those who lacked this revelation), may have appeared. But certain it is that, wherever this notion of hierarchical arrangements of cultural views of experience appears, it has profound effects upon education; and it has enormously influenced our own attitude.[80]

I hope I have said enough to show where the dilemma lies. I do not propose to attempt to resolve these issues here.

The plea for an acknowledgement of the emotions, of intuition, was the central input into the radical movement of humanistic psychology. This opened up a new set of dilemmas which are more familiar to us today than they were in 1971 when Paul Adams, in *Childrens Rights*, criticised the revolutionary left:

> Theirs is a patriarchal and masculine rhetoric that sways only the adult, the male, or the authoritarian (female as well as male) who holds to patriarchal values.[81]

The concept of 'patriarchal values' raises questions not only about the devotion to rationalism of western educators, but about several of the other issues raised in this chapter. Are, for example, authoritarianism, revolutionism, confidence in the state, adult perceptions of childhood, or schooling itself, expressions of patriarchy? Indeed, this whole study could be said to be imbued with patriarchal assumptions. It makes a man nervous to put pen to paper.

L. *HIPPIES AND STRAIGHTS*

As I noted in chapter 1, there were few thoroughgoing hippies involved in the radical movement. But there were some in the Free Schools Campaign and in some of the free schools. A particular tension arose within the A.S.Neill Trust:

> The first meetings of the A.S.Neill Trust used to be at conference centres with beds laid on and stuff. And we said 'well there's no need for all that, we'll all bring sleeping bags and cut the price down'. A lot of people actually left the A.S.Neill Turst simply because of that - a lot of people who'd been into it from the Homer Lane, A.S.Neill faction didn't actually like the idea of not having gold-printed invites, rooms reserved for them and stuff. So in a sense it was actually bringing out some people's politics, saying 'are you actually prepared to go as far as the thing is going to go?' It is about urban working class people and they can't afford to have expensive week-end conferences and if you want children from the free school [to attend the conference] they're probably going to break a few things. So it's not going to be 'nice'. We saw and appreciated that we were taking politics into people's personal lives and not just the abstract thing. Naively to start with we

> thought that all the left would support us. In fact the left didn't want to know.[82]

The left, in a word, was 'straight'. There are a number of points in this statement we might want to examine, but I will confine myself to the characteristically 'hippy' notion that 'the personal is political'. For hippies, the transformation of society begins with the transformation of individual life-styles. Those who are unwilling, or unable, to detach themselves from conventionalism (the 'bourgoeis lifestyle') in their lives are helping to prop up the system. 'Before you change the world you've got to change yourself' went the slogan. We can see here 'prefigurative' politics taken to its logical conclusion.

Most radical activists within education may have been relatively 'straight', but this did not mean they were unruffled by the hippies' charges. There *is* something anachronistic about middle class people assembling in a comfortable conference centre to discuss the problems of working class children, and then getting upset when working class children come into the conference and disturb the proceedings. It is not easy, however, to say precisely what the nature of this anachronism is (is it something to do with guilt?) or what might be done about it. It is not clear that abandoning your reserved room and sleeping on the floor in a sleeping bag solves the problem (although as a symbolic gesture it might be worth something).

Paradoxically, if most radicals were regarded by hippies as 'straight', ordinary working class children may have thought of radicals as hippies. At White Lion Street Free School it was common for the children to call the workers 'hippies', despite the fact that few of the workers fitted that description. Enquiries from the children revealed that hippies, in their eyes, had the following

characteristics. First, they were middle class people who had relinquished certain trappings which the children regarded as desirable: 'posh' homes, new cars, smart clothes. Second, they weren't interested in making money. Third, they dressed casually, even scruffily. Fourth, they had certain tastes associated with hippies: rock music, vegetarian foods for example. Fifth, they used (albeit occasionally) certain hippy expressions like 'far out', 'too much', 'bread', 'split' etc. Sixth, their life-style was unconventional: for example, they lived with partners rather than getting married. Seventh, they weren't prejudiced against homosexuals and blacks like 'normal' people were.

Such perceptions were quite acute: radicals (at least of the free school variety) *had* made changes in their personal life-styles. But perhaps they didn't go far enough in this direction to contribute to the collapse of bourgoeis society which the hippies had in mind.

CONCLUSION

I have not in this chapter attempted to cover all the things radicals argued about: they argued about most things. Nor have I tried to suggest the 'right' answer in each of the debates, although it will have been clear in a few cases that I am inclined towards one side or the other.

It is tempting to think that if the radical movement had somehow resolved these debates - by intensive study, perhaps, or by examining the evidence, or possibly by just going on debating the issues until a consensus emerged - it would have gained a unity and coherence which

would have made it a much more powerful force than it was. One might think that that would be a very good thing. On the other hand, that might be an impossible dream, not just because the effort involved would be enormous, but for a rather deeper reason: it may be that *certainty*, of the kind which would be achieved by settling these debates, is incompatible with the radicalism I am discussing in this study. My suggestion is that that radicalism was essentially doubtfull. In being doubtful about science and about rationalism; in favouring feelings and the subjective as much as thoughts and the objective, it seemed to be cutting itself off from the means of resolving debates in any absolute sense. The famous slogans of the 1960s, "Let a hundred flowers bloom" and "Do your own thing" point to a desire for social and educational arrangements which permit people to survive and thrive without having other people's certainties imposed upon them. It was a desire which had little chance of being fulfilled in the political climate which predominated after 1976.

Several of the dilemmas I have considered in this chapter will emerge again in the next four chapters. The next three chapters will take us into much more specific discussion of educational questions, first by looking at the experience of White Lion Street Free School, and then by examining radical theories about learning.

NOTES

1. From an unpublished manuscript *The Radical Rift* kindly lent to me by Gabriel Chanan.

2. David Rubinstein and Colin Stoneman (eds) *Education for Democracy*, 'Introduction', page 11.

3. Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden *Education and the Working Class* page 16.

4. Paul Goodman *Compulsory Miseducation* page 51.

5. R.F. Mackenzie *Escape from the Classroom* page 87.

6. Keith Paton *The Great Brain Robbery* page 3.

7. David Ransom in *Rank & File Occasional Journal* No 1, Spring 1977, page 2.

8. This was also what the right-wing understood by the crisis in education: see Rhodes Boyson *The Crisis in Education*.

9. R.F. Mackenzie *A Question of Living* page 28.

10. This is discussed by Douglas Holly *Beyond Curriculum* pages 38 ff. For example (page 40): "The argument is that any confusion or slackness in teaching aims is bound to disadvantage the working-class pupil by comparison with his middle-class contemporaries, who are less dependent on schools for their education."

11. Ian Lister *Deschooling* page 4.

12. Chanie Rosenberg in *Education and Society*, page 10, claims that it would because "In any rational society by far the biggest spender will be education..." However, socialists whose chief interest is in other fields - health, industry or overseas development, for example - might disagree.

13. See, for example, Chris Searle *This New Season*. This view can also be found in the pages of *Rank & File*, *Socialist Teacher* and *Vanguard*.

14. Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist *What School Is For* page 49.

15. Edward Blishen *The School That I'd Like* was a compilation of responses to an invitation in *The Observer* to school students to send in their views of school.

16. This is the view advanced by, for example, Angela Davis in *Women, Race and Class*.

17. Such as the books of A.S. Neill; Gerard Holmes *The Idiot Teacher*; the books of W. David Wills; Michael Burn *Mr. Lyward's Answer*; Michael Croft *Spare the Rod*; Paul Goodman *Growing Up Absurd*; and R.F. Mackenzie *A Question of Living*. By 1965, however, Mackenzie had taken up the question of class (see *Escape from the Classroom* page 173 ff.

18. See chapter 1, footnotes 22 and 23, page 66.

19. R.F. Mackenzie *A Question of Living* page 96.

20. Colin and Mog Ball *Education for a Change* page 11.

21. By 'revolutionists' I refer to those who advocate revolution - as opposed to revolutionaries who actually make revolutions.

22. A.E. Jenning *The Struggle in Education* page 28.

23. *Ibid* page 33.

24. C.A. Helvetius *De L'Esprit* page 489.

25. A.E. Jenning *op cit.*

26. *Ibid* page 40.

27. This view was argued by Paul Goodman in *Growing Up Absurd* chapter XI.

28. John Holt *The Underachieving School* page 129.

29. See Campaign Against Repression at Ladbroke School *Ladbroke School: Situation and Struggle*. The campaign, in 1972 and 1973, was mounted largely against the headteacher of Ladbroke School who, it was claimed, was contemptuous of black and working class students.

30. Martin Thomas and Paul Wimpeney, letter in *Blackbored* 4, pages 13-14.

31. John Cox (a pseudonym for Gabriel Chanan) in *Blackbored* 4, pages 14-15.

32. Wini Breines 'Community and Organisation: The New Left and Michel's "Iron Law"' in *Social Problems* Vol 27 No 4, April 1980, pages 419-429.

33. *Ibid* page 422.

34. *Ibid* page 421. The case for 'prefigurative' politics had been made in 1950 by Ernst Zander: "The party must incorporate and anticipate the organisation of the future society in all its essentials, that is, it must manifest the outlines in skeletal form." ('The Great Utopia' in *Contemporary Issues* Vol 2 No 5, Winter 1950, page 15.)

35. Nigel Wright 'One Disaster After Another' in *Libertarian Education* 22, pages 10-11.

36. Chris Searle *This New Season* page 7. But, despite this view, Searle did believe that there was room for manouevre in state schools.

37. Douglas Holly *Society, Schools and Humanity* page 25.

38. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *Schooling in Capitalist America* page 8. For similar viewpoints, see Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist *op cit* page 10, and Ken Jones *Beyond Progressive Education* page 19.

39. See for example, Kevin Harris *Education and Knowledge*.

40. See Colin Fletcher, Maxine Caron and Wyn Williams *Schools on Trial*.

41. See John Watts *The Countesthorpe Experience*. However, it has been argued that in the long run the Countesthorpe experiment was defeated: see 'The Death of a Progressive School' in *Lib Ed* Vol 2 No 6, Winter 1987, page 18.

42. See *Rank & File* issues 19-25, passim.

43. John Holt *Escape from Childhood* page 37.

44. See John Holt *The Underachieving School* page 37.

45. *Rank & File Occasional Journal* No 1, 1977, page 2.

46. Ernst Fischer *Marx in his Own Words* pages 90-91.

47. Michael W. Apple 'Series Editor's Introduction' in William J. Reese *Power and the Promise of School Reform*.

48. Ray Hemmings *Fifty Years of Freedom* chapter 8.

49. See, for example, Wilhelm Reich *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*.

50. See Kevin Harris *op cit* page 140 ff.

51. Chris Searle *Classrooms of Resistance* pages 8-9.

52. Geoffrey Summerfield 'Brainwashed Replicators' in *Times Educational Supplement* 31.10.75. See also George Dennison *Lives of Children* page 232.

53. Margaret Mead 'Our Educational Emphases in Primitive Perspective' in American Journal of Sociology 48, 1942-3, page 637.

54. See Martyn Hammersley *Teacher Perspectives*, Units 9 and 10 of Open University Course E202.

55. This is explored, for example, by Stephen Rowland *The Enquiring Classroom*.

56. Leila Berg in Paul Adams and others *Childrens Rights* pages 42-43.

57. A.S. Neill *Summerhill* page 4.

58. School of Barbiana *Letter to a Teacher* page 19.

59. Jeremy Mulford, letter in *Radical Education* 1, page 5.

60. School of Barbiana, *op cit*, page 20.

61. *Ibid* page 93.

62. *Ibid* page 105/6.

63. In 1962 by Paul Goodman *Compulsory Miseducation*; in 1965 by Colin Ward 'A Modest Proposal for the Repeal of the 1944 Education Act' in *Anarchy* 53, July 1965; in 1969 by the School Without Walls (see page 4/32 above); and in 1969 by John Holt *The Underachieving School* page 32.

64. Notably Harry Judge *School is Not Yet Dead* and Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist *op cit*.

65. For example Nigel Wright 'A Black and Red Herring' in *Rank & File* 19, page 21-23; Douglas Holly *Beyond Curriculum* chapter 9; Nicholas Walter in *Libertarian Education* 16.

66. The serious hypothesis I would offer here is that the 'oppositional' mentality referred to in chapter 1 could create a dependency on the part of radicals on the things they oppose. If a large part of one's sense of identity is built around being part of a political campaign,

then the success of that campaign - which would make it redundant - could be deeply threatening to that sense of identity. This kind of issue is touched upon by A.Cohen 'The Elasticity of Evil: Changes in the Social Definition of Deviance' in Martyn Hammersley and Peter Woods (eds) *The Process of Schooling.*

67. I am not using 'idealism' in the philosophical sense of a theory of the origin of ideas. But this philosophical sense does have a relevance to my discussion, as do the competing theories of materialism and dialectical materialism.

68. Interview with Rhiannon Evans 26 August 1986.

69. Brian Simon *The Radical Tradition in Education in Britain.*

70. Karl Popper *The Open Society and Its Enemies* Vol 2 page 224.

71. Michael P. Smith *The Libertarians and Education.*

72. R.M.Jones *Fantasy and Feeling in Education.*

73. Ray Hemmings *op cit* page 178.

74. Lynn White *Frontiers of Knowledge.*

75. Cited by Philip Mairet in his introduction to Jean-Paul Sartre *Existentialism and Humanism* page 11.

76. Michael F.D. Young (ed) *Knowledge and Control* page 3.

77. For example, Paul Willis *Learning to Labour.*

78. This is the viewpoint represented, for example, by the magazine *Resurgence.*

79. Cited in Karl Popper *op cit* page 212.

80. Margaret Mead *op cit* page 635.

81. Paul Adams 'The Infant, the Family and Society' in Paul Adams and others *Childrens Rights* page 53.

82. Interview with Phil Collins 9 September 1986.

CHAPTER 6

RADICAL PRACTICE: WHITE LION STREET FREE SCHOOL - PART I

My purpose in this chapter and the next is to examine some aspects of a specific example of radical educational practice. My hope is that it will illuminate some of the dilemmas discussed in the last chapter, and contribute to an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of radical ideas.

I have chosen White Lion Street Free School (WL) for a simple reason. I worked there myself for over four years. I have personal knowledge to draw upon, I am in touch with many other people associated with the school, and the school has kindly allowed me access to all the documentation kept on the school premises [1]. (The documentation of other free schools seems largely to have disappeared).

It is not the aim of these chapters to provide a comprehensive study of WL, valuable as that would be. Over the years the school has published a certain amount of descriptive literature [2] and I do not intend to replicate that. My intention is to pick out a few issues which can serve as case studies in a consideration of the radical approach to education. It is necessary to emphasise that what follows does not constitute the findings of any methodical 'scientific' research into WL. Although I have interviewed a number of workers and former workers, I have not systematically interviewed all of them, nor the children (or ex-children) or parents. Some of what I say is based upon my own knowledge of the school and what others have said to me over the years. Some of the things I say are contested by others

associated with the school, and while I have tried to represent differing interpretations where I am aware of them, I make no claim that what follows constitutes any kind of 'objective truth'.

The most obvious difficulty which arises in such an account is that I was not at the school before 1979 nor after 1983. It should be understood, therefore, that unless otherwise stated I am referring to the school as it was in that period.

The opportunities for radicals of the 1960s and 1970s to put their ideas into practice were limited. When they did have the opportunity to do so within existing schools, the outcome of their efforts was often clouded by the constraints under which they had to operate. To take a well-known example, the radical teachers at William Tyndale school could claim that their innovations were thwarted by divisions within the staff, fierce opposition from some of the parents and governors, attacks in the press and intervention by the authority [3]. Such obstacles to radical experimentation were commonly experienced [4], and indeed much of the radical literature dwells at length on the resistance encountered by radical initiatives [5].

The free schools, however, as independent schools set up by radical minded people, did allow radical experimentation freed from some of the more obvious constraints on mainstream schooling. (This is not to say there were no constraints on free schools - see page 301-308 below). Their experience is therefore of special interest, even if, as we saw in chapter 4, many radicals had reservations about the wisdom of free schooling.

In these two chapters I will focus on several issues which, on the basis of my experience at WL, seem to me to be of particular interest. In this chapter I will examine the origins and background of the school and provide some information about the children. I then discuss the transience of the WL population before turning to the main theme of this chapter - the question of democracy. Finally in this chapter I will look at the constraints experienced by WL.

In the next chapter I will be looking at aspects of freedom and learning in the free school, consider the problems of evaluating the school and end by suggesting a number of pointers to successful practice.

ORIGINS AND BACKGROUND

WL was not typical of the free schools, but then there was no typical free school. We might say that the term 'free school' describes a genus rather than a species. WL was generally recognised as the most competently organised free school, which helps to explain why it still exists long after most others closed. Related to this, WL enjoyed greater material security - in terms of premises, finance and staffing - than other free schools. It had periodic financial crises, but it survived them. In 1982 WL became fully funded by the ILEA. While others had received local authority funding as truancy centres, WL has been the only free school to receive LEA funding as a *free school* [6]. WL was considerably larger than other free schools except for Scotland Road at its (brief) peak. It had a better public image (part merited, part created by diligent PR work) than other free schools and developed a more constructive relationship with other sectors of the education

service. And, finally, WL developed a stronger sense of institutional identity than all but one or two of the others.

The initial impulse to set up WL came from a public meeting addressed by people from Scotland Road (Liverpool) Free School in London in 1971. This meeting so excited its audience that several of them formed a group to start planning a London free school. The planning group, which included Alison Truefitt (education correspondent of the London *Evening Standard*) and Peter Newell (a former deputy editor of the *Times Educational Supplement*, by this time education officer of the National Council for Civil Liberties), was high-powered and gained considerable credibility in educational circles. A number of prominent figures, including A.H.Halsey, Maurice Kogan, Royston Lambert, Ian Lister, A.S.Neill, Lady Plowden, Harry Ree and Michael (now Lord) Young agreed to become patrons, giving the project a prestigious image and helping with early fund-raising efforts. A company limited by guarantee (that is, not for profit) was set up, called First London Free School Limited, although this turned out to be a misnomer because the first free school in London was South Villas Comprehensive. Legally, it was this company which owned and controlled WL until it ceased being an independent school in 1982. The company was run by a board - variously called 'The Council', 'The Members' or 'The Subscribers' but known affectionately to all at WL as 'the stooges' in recognition of the fact that they were a non-elected group whose primary function was to meet the stipulations of company law. There was an unwritten agreement that they would not involve themselves in the democratic management of the school. (When, in 1982, WL was taken over by the ILEA, the role of 'the stooges' became unclear. The company remained in existence with some vestigial (but not negligible) functions *vis-a-vis* the school, and so 'the stooges', by this time consisting of former workers supplemented

by an ex-pupil and a few parents co-opted by 'the stooges' themselves, remained in existence.)

In 1972 the planning group obtained premises in White Lion Street, close to the Angel, Islington, and just 150 yards from the school formerly known as Risinghill. It was a fine Georgian building which had originally been a hotel, had later become an Islington Council hostel, but was by now derelict. Islington Council was persuaded to lease the building to the company for a peppercorn rent. It was in no fit state for any municipal purpose but could not be demolished because it was a listed building.

Some 20 volunteers worked for ten weeks to clear the building of debris and put it into serviceable condition, although its history of dilapidation could never be concealed. (In 1982 the building was thoroughly renovated.) During the rehabilitation of the building in 1972 local children wandered in to see what was going on, and were encouraged to join in with the work. In time the parents of these children were contacted and informed of the planned school. This was how WL enrolled its first children.

The school opened formally in September 1972 with 27 children. Within a year the number rose to 43 and subsequently numbers have ranged from this up to a maximum of 50. The number 50 had been envisaged by the planning group as the ideal for a school of this type, and in fact it turned out to be the maximum that the building could accommodate, taking into account safety regulations. By 1982 the school had formed the opinion that 150 might be a better number of children, if suitable premises could be found [7].

At the opening of the school the number of workers was indeterminate, because many adults had offered to help in a voluntary, part-time capacity. Adults working at WL became known as 'workers', rather than 'teachers' or 'staff': the term 'workers' recognised that all were equally involved in all the tasks of the school - teaching, cooking, cleaning, school-keeping, repair and maintenance, administration, planning, policy making, youth work, family case work, pastoral care etc. It was a principle that the division of labour should be minimised [8]. After the first year all workers received the same salary (part-timers *pro rata*) with small adjustments for special needs such as dependent children.

Within a year a pattern of seven full-time workers and three part-timers emerged, plus a number of volunteers who came in for a few hours to help with specific activities. In subsequent years the number of workers has not varied greatly from the equivalent of eight full-timers, although the proportion of part-timers has varied, and there have been considerable variations in the numbers of voluntary workers, students on placements, and parents working regularly in the school.

WL responded to the charge that it was lavishly staffed (having roughly one worker for every six children) by pointing out that the ILEA had one employee for every 8.2 children [9]. What WL did was to bring all its employees into working contact with the children - a practical implementation of the radical belief that all adults have something to offer children, not just professional teachers.

Between 1972 and 1986 there were 52 people who had been paid workers at WL. Their average stay was about three-and-a-half years. Ten stayed for more than five years, but 27 stayed for less than three years. No

systematic information on WL workers has been collected, although their backgrounds, experience and qualifications would be a matter of interest. Although the school, at least in its pre-ILEA days, required no formal qualifications of its workers [10], the great majority [11] had been through higher education and might conventionally be called middle-class (although some would wish to dispute this categorisation). The employment in 1981 of a local working class mother with no formal qualifications was unusual, as was the employment in 1982 of an 18-year-old former pupil of the school.

THE CHILDREN*

The age range of children was from three to sixteen, although a few have stayed on past their seventeenth birthdays. Children under five - there were normally between 10 and 15 of them - stayed most of the time in the nursery, three self-contained rooms of the first floor. The children of school age, usually about 35 in number, spanned the age range but with something of a preponderance in the 13-plus range, reflecting the greater number of applicants of that age group.

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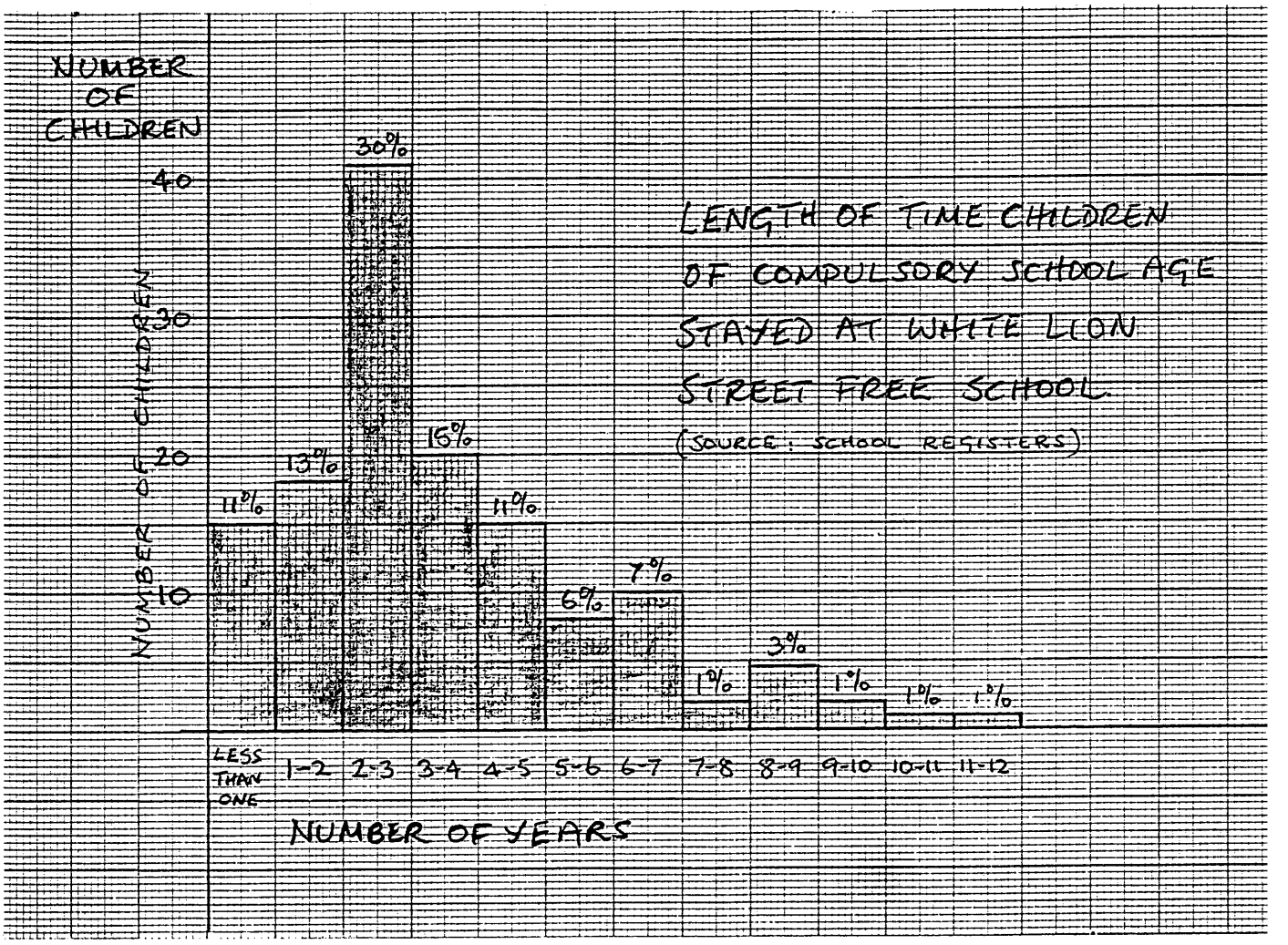
*The Children at WL have always been called 'kids'. This was decided by the kids themselves at a meeting: they preferred it to 'children', 'young people', 'students' or 'pupils'. Many were not children, and the school tried not to treat them 'like children'. The term 'children' has condescending associations - of powerlessness, passivity, irresponsibility - which the school was anxious to get away from. It may be argued, however, that 'kids' has similar associations (in Britain if not in America) and out of deference to convention I will use the word 'children', conscious that it is unsatisfactory.

Between 1972 and 1986, 261 children attended WL [12]. Of these, 105 attended the nursery only. Of the 156 children of compulsory school age who have attended the school, there has been an equal number of boys and girls. It was the school's policy to maintain a balance of boys and girls, but the Sex Discrimination Act of 1976 appeared to make this practice illegal, leading to a prolonged debate within WL over whether to comply or not with the letter of the Act. In a small school the lack of a sex balance can, for example, make a fifteen-year-old the only teenage girl in the school. It was surely not the intention of the Sex Discrimination Act to create such a situation.

Children have joined WL at all ages, but the commonest ages of entry have been five or under (reflecting the fact that the nursery was a significant recruiting ground for the main school), and 13 or over. 24 per cent of children came into the former category, and 32 per cent into the latter. Children have also left the school at all ages, although 38 per cent have stayed on until school leaving age. 27 per cent left to transfer to other local schools. 15 per cent were crossed off the roll for poor attendance, although this was not done in the early years of the school, and since WL ceased to be an independent school such a policy became problematic. The remaining 20 per cent of leavers is accounted for by those who left for other reasons (such as moving out of the locality) and those for whom there is no record of their reason for leaving.

The chart on the next page shows the length of stay of children (of compulsory school age) at WL. The majority of children stayed at the school for less than three years; over two-thirds stayed less than four years. In part this reflects the fact that many children joined the school at age 13 or over, having therefore only three years or less of



compulsory schooling remaining. But even children who joined the school at younger ages have tended not to stay very long. For example, of the 38 children who joined the main school at the age of five (30 of them having come from the nursery), 22 had left WL within three years, and only eight of them stayed longer than four years. This tendency for the school population to be somewhat transient is something I will discuss shortly.

Of the 156 school age children who attended WL, 83 per cent came from working class backgrounds. (See Appendix B). Given the school's catchment area (which is the same area described with sentimental imprecision by Leila Berg in *Risinghill: Death of A Comprehensive School*), high unemployment, poverty, poor housing, broken families and poor health are all part of the landscape. For example, only 40 per

cent of WL children lived with both natural parents. More than half lived with a single parent. (The figure for Inner London as a whole, in 1987, was 25 per cent living with a single parent [13]). However, it is not clear that the backgrounds of WL children were greatly different from those of children in many inner city schools throughout Britain.

Of the 17 per cent of children who may be deemed middle class, all but a few were children of parents who were deeply concerned with developing an alternative lifestyle. Typically they had low incomes and lived in council housing or poor quality private rented accommodation. Although the school's catchment area did touch on two neighbourhoods which housed Islington's middle class proper, children from these neighbourhoods were not attracted to the school.

Ethnically, children attending WL have been predominantly white, a high proportion having Irish antecedents. Of the school-age children, there have been 16 of mixed race (Westindian/white), four Westindian (all from one family), five with parents from Cyprus, and eight others with parents born outside the British Isles. Together these account for one-fifth of the school-age children. Although children from Asian families have attended the nursery, it was not until 1986 that one of them opted to join the main school at the age of five. In general we may observe that people from ethnic minorities (who are well represented in the catchment area) have tended not to choose the free school.

Apart from the 38 children who joined the main school at the age of five, the overwhelming majority of children coming to WL had experienced difficulties in other schools. In the case of over-11s, the great majority had been persistent truants from, or in serious

difficulties within, local secondary schools. In the case of primary age children, the most common problem had been unhappiness at school. This pattern had been established right from the outset: of the first 27 children in 1972, more than half had been in difficulties in other schools.

These facts were significant for WL because they meant that most children came to the school as an escape from somewhere else. Although the school required from applicants a positive expression of desire to come to WL (the school has never accepted referrals unless they positively wanted to come), what in effect it got was an expression of positive desire to get away from local schools. Quite often WL was a last resort for desperate parents and children, and whether or not they sympathised with the school's philosophy was, for them, a secondary consideration. (The experience of First Street School in New York was identical [14].)

In consequence WL contained two cultures. On the one hand were children who came into the school from the nursery, or who joined the school in the early years of compulsory schooling. Their parents tended to have an active sympathy with the libertarian ideals of the school. On the other hand were older children who had been through hard times in other schools: their parents, typically but not invariably, were not much interested in libertarian ideals. These two sets of children (and two sets of parents) did not mesh together very comfortably, and, as we shall see, a tension existed with caused difficulties for the school.

THE TRANSIENT POPULATION

As we have seen, there was a constant turnover of both workers and children at WL. (This was also a feature of other free schools [15]). This placed a strain on the school's policies of freedom and democracy. Although some children did stay at the school for a long time, such stalwarts were always outnumbered by relative newcomers who would, typically, not be staying very long. The school did not imagine that sensible use of freedom and democratic procedures would be quickly learned, but too few children stayed long enough to learn them. And to function effectively, WL relied on the development of strong, mutually trusting relationships between workers and children. Such relationships take time to build, but the turnover of workers and children meant that only a minority of worker-child relationships were long-term ones.

Of course high turnover of staff and children is a characteristic of many inner city schools, and in this sense WL may be said to have been a victim of circumstances beyond its control. But it will be worth enquiring whether WL could have done anything to ameliorate the problem.

Amongst the worker group, there has always been a core with a long-term commitment to the school. The reason why so many others (a majority) stayed for less than three years has not been systematically investigated, but it is reasonable to suggest a link between this and the hardships of working in a free school (see chapter 4, pages 198/199). In particular we might look at the financial hardship. The pay of WL workers was (until 1983) usually less than two-thirds of national average weekly earnings - in some years a lot less [16]. In only one year did WL workers receive more than half of what they could

have earned working in a conventional school. Whilst the school in its first ten years never had the resources to pay its workers adequately, there was an element of consciously wanting to keep wages down:

> ... we share an ideological dislike of "professional" differentials, and would not wish to pay ourselves an amount that would put us out of the context of those we wish to work with as equals.[17]

It is not certain that WL's wages policy did satisfactorily place workers 'in this context'. Although most free school children came from poor families, those parents who were in full-time work would normally earn much more than free school workers - and so would children who got a job after leaving the school. That the low pay of WL workers helped parents and children to think of them as 'equals' was a presumption which was never examined.

The possibility existed for WL to devise a wages structure which might have reduced worker turnover. In its independent days workers could have been paid more if a greater proportion of the budget had been allocated to wages. (And to emphasise that there was scope for this, it may be noted that in the early 1980s the school ran two minibuses, one bought brand new and the other nearly new). Or wages could have been increased if the school had opted to work with a larger child/worker ratio. Or a system of annual wage increments could have been introduced so that those who remained a long time would be rewarded for doing so. This is not the place to argue the pros and cons of such arrangements. Many of those who have been associated with WL would argue against such schemes on grounds of principle. We have here a good example of a radical dilemma: an 'ideological dislike' of high (or even adequate) wages may be the (unanticipated) cause of a practical difficulty, staff turnover. Which should take precedence: the ideological principle or the resolution of the practical problem?

Turning now to the turnover of children, the significant figure is the 27 per cent of children of school age who transferred from WL to other local schools. Among the reasons expressed by children and their parents for the decision to transfer were the following:

First, dissatisfaction with the progress children were making at WL in traditional school subjects. Some parents believed (not always correctly as it turned out) that their children would 'get on better' at other schools.

Second, a feeling that a conventional school would have more to offer, in terms of facilities and resources and, at the secondary age level, examination courses. There was also a feeling that the experience of conventional schooling might be worthwhile in itself. One WL youngster remarked: "Assuming I have children of my own, I'd like to send them to both a free school and an ordinary school, so then they could choose for themselves" [18]. In fact, of the 45 children who moved from WL to other local schools, eight chose to come back.

Third, a shortage of friends at WL. Typically a child had only four or five other children of similar age to make friends with. If they didn't get on with these four or five, life could be quite lonely. This is, of course, a problem common to all small schools.

Fourth, some children were unhappy at WL. (It was the same in America; as John Holt wrote "One of the problems of many of the free schools... is that many of the students are surprisingly unhappy." [19]). In particular, at WL, there was a problem of bullying which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Fifth, there was dissatisfaction with the school in general, most of all perhaps with the behaviour of older children:

> When the school started up I did worry at first that there'd be no discipline. I went up. When I heard the way some of the children talked and answered back I said "Oh no, I can't stay here". I just hope my kids aren't like that. I don't know what I'd do if they were. I've heard that other kids who go to 'truant schools' are like this. They think perhaps it helps them to get it out. But it's a bit hard to listen to, isn't it? It makes you feel like wanting to hit them. [20]

And finally, there was in some cases a belated discovery that they did not, after all, agree with the school's philosophy.

I will not discuss these issues, but simply make the point that any radical project, however fine its ideals, must satisfy its clients. A number of radical projects in widely different areas, such as community arts projects or publication distribution cooperatives, have learnt this the hard way [21]. But satisfying the clients may force radicals to compromise their principles, and again a dilemma is faced.

A matter of continuing debate has been WL's admissions policy. WL had always, on principle, maintained an open admissions policy; that is to say, any child who applied could come to the school provided there was a place available (with due regard to maintaining a rough age and sex balance). Before the school opened the planning group had thought about this and decided:

> If more children want to come than the school can take, the teachers will attempt to select those children who seem to be in most difficulty at their existing schools. Hopefully, some consultation with the teachers at the local schools might be possible in such cases - and ideally in all cases.[22]

In fact the school never adopted this policy, and by 1977 a rather different policy was agreed:

> In deciding which school age children should join the school, there should be no selection based on individual histories or characteristics, if the general criteria are satisfied (ie living within the catchment area and maintaining a rough age and sex

balance in the school). Applicants aged 14 or over will be admitted subject to the decision of the full-time workers. [23]

There were those who argued that such an open admissions policy led the school to be overloaded with 'problem children'. Others disputed this, challenging the labelling of some children as 'problems'. Yet others agreed that the admissions policy tended to allow a high proportion of children with special needs to enter the school, but considered this to be a good thing, since it meant that the school was responding to a real need in the locality. Whatever is the case, the open admissions policy did cause WL to accept rather more older children than younger children (because this was where the greater number of applications came from). However, accepting older children tended to reinforce the high turnover of children, since they would not be staying at school much longer. An alternative admissions policy, which might have counteracted the turnover, would have been to give preference to younger applicants. This indeed was A.S.Neill's policy, although for a different reason:

> I don't take anybody over 11 - they abuse freedom, they just don't understand it. [24]

Although WL did debate such a policy, it never adopted it.

To summarise my general point here, there are instruments - such as salary structure or admissions policy - which might be used in order to ameliorate a perceived problem - staff and pupil turnover. (It is another discussion altogether whether particular instruments would work). But the use of these instruments seemed to breach strongly-held principles, and thus the school found itself on the horns of a dilemma.

DEMOCRACY

The democratisation of schools was an aim shared by all the currents in the radical movement (except, of course, the deschoolers). For WL democracy was at the centre of its philosophy. In its formal structures all members of the school community - children, parents and workers - were invited to take an equal part in decision-making. There was no headteacher and no hierarchy within the staff. Running the school was to be the collective responsibility of all.

Not only was democracy seen as the right way to run a school: it was also regarded as a central feature of the curriculum. This had been Neill's view too:

> As education, self-government is of infinite value... One weekly General School Meeting is of more value than a week's curriculum of school subjects.[25]

By participating in the democratic process children (and parents and workers too) would learn about the just conduct of human affairs. Democracy was expected to involve not just the decision-making process, but to extend into all aspects of school life, such as the learning process and the relationships between teachers and learners.

MEETINGS

In the first years of the school formal decisions were taken at a weekly meeting, open to all. After some time this meeting was split into two parts: a daytime part (which became known as the 'kids meeting') and an evening part. Both meetings were open to all, anyone could put an item on the agenda, and minutes were available to all.

In practice the two meetings came to have rather different agendas. The kids meeting dealt with matters which the children wanted to discuss and with matters which the children could easily comprehend. Matters on which the children were expected to have strong views were usually - but not quite always - brought to this meeting. Matters which were thought to require a complex or lengthy discussion in a calm atmosphere tended to be considered at evening meetings. And so a *de facto* division of responsibility arose (although this was never formally acknowledged until 1985, when the workers attempted to formalise it). Inevitably it came to be the case that decisions which were, from an adult point of view, more serious ones were reached at the evening meeting. For example, in 1981 and 1982 all the complex and difficult decisions concerning the application to ILEA for funding, and the detailed negotiations of WL's place within ILEA, were reached at evening meetings. The kids meeting was involved only to the extent that it was kept informed of broad developments by the workers. The children were aware of the rather different nature of the two meetings and I do not think they objected to the arrangement except in one or two specific instances.

In fact very few children stayed for the evening meetings and in the whole life of the school it has been rare to see even three or four parents at either meeting. This figure must, though, be taken in perspective. In 1979/80 (for example) the 37 children of school age had 44 parents between them. A turnout of four parents was thus 9 per cent of parents. Many schools would consider such a parental turnout for any school meeting to be rather satisfactory.

But WL's aim was not just to attract the enthusiastic parents who could be expected to attend school functions. It wanted to involve all

the parents. Unfortunately, in the words of one of the school's founders:

> ...the aim of involving parents and children didn't happen much. We talked about 'waiting for democracy' and other phrases which people adopt when they can't decide how far to go with community control at any time. [26]

Given that major policy decisions were reached at evening meetings, the school has not been successful in its aim of involving parents and children fully in decision-making.

Over the years workers gave a great deal of thought to how they might achieve greater parental involvement. They hypothesised - on the basis of conversations with parents - reasons for the disappointing attendance at meetings. Perhaps the majority of parents were victims of the prevailing attitude that schooling was a matter of handing over their children to the professionals who were assumed to know what they were doing. Perhaps it was hard for parents to find the time and energy to come to meetings; maybe they lacked the confidence and skills to participate; probably they found the meetings long, tiresome and esoteric. Possibly they were uncertain that their views would be valued. And some parents, it was believed, felt that the workers were paid to run the school and should be left to get on with it.

To say that WL did not succeed in involving parents in the democratic process is not, however, to say that parents were excluded from school life. The school was always open to parents, and it was usual to find several parents in the building at any time. There was always a core of supportive parents who would come in on a regular basis to help out - working in the nursery for example, or helping to prepare dinner, or cleaning and maintaining the building, or working with small groups of children on specific projects. And many parents would call in for a cup

of tea and a chat or a meal now and then. The school's allocation system (see page 344) helped the development of close relationships between parents and workers. Every worker knew, and would be on first-name terms with, almost every parent. This closeness was a partial substitute for involvement in formal meetings, because workers were aware of parents' feelings about the school and were sensitive to these in reaching policy decisions.

KIDS MEETINGS

The weekly kids meetings (open to workers and parents as well) were considered to be the centrepiece of free school life. They were intended to be real decision-making meetings, and their decisions were to be binding on the whole school. The contemporary model was Summerhill's system of 'self government' [27] although the idea of children's self-government is an old one: in the early 19th century Matthew Davenport Hill said of his school Hazelwood: "We endeavour to teach our pupils the arts of self-government and self-education" [28].

It is not easy to evaluate the role of kids meetings at WL. As was often the case with the school, there was a gap between what was supposed to happen and what really did happen. The quality of kids meetings was extremely variable [29]. Attendance was not compulsory (although the idea of making it so was mooted from time to time). Despite the fact that other rooms were locked up during meetings, so that there was nowhere else to go but outside, and despite the fact that workers nagged at the children to come, poor attendance was a frequent problem. In particular, if some malfeasance was on the agenda, it was easy for those responsible to avoid 'facing the music' by

missing the meeting. The problem of attendance tended to come and go in cycles, just as it did at Kirkdale:

> There were weekly meetings of the kids that were sometimes marvellous - the children attended, thought hard, talked, tried to find solutions to problems. At other times meetings slumped - no-one came, they said it was no use.[30]

Kids meetings were sometimes unruly to the extent that it was impossible to transact any of the business on the agenda in any serious way. Many children were unable to conform to conventional adult expectations of a business meeting. In Neill's view this was a function of age: "Children under 12 are no good at self-government because they haven't yet reached the social age." [31]. This was not WL's experience: often younger children were more disciplined, and more thoughtfully involved in meetings, than the older ones, for reasons perhaps connected with the two cultures mentioned on page 283 above. Adults were forced into a policing role which subtly contradicted the spirit of 'it's your meeting'. Many devices for getting more orderly meetings were tried, the most successful being to have an older child who was respected by the other children chair the meeting. Sometimes, though, this respect was really fear, and the chairing could take on an unattractive authoritarianism.

The kids meetings were not always chaotic. Sometimes they were orderly, focussed and impressive. The trouble was that this could not be relied upon, and decisions would then pass by default to the evening meeting. Although I recollect some extraordinary meetings, when all the children were crowded in and concentrated for as much as two hours on an important issue, it was more common for the concentration span of the meeting to be short, so that complex matters could not adequately be dealt with.

Group dynamics were all important. The school bullies could easily intimidate other children, and one or two dominant personalities could constantly disrupt the proceedings. Unpopular children could get an aggressive reception if they tried to express an unpopular opinion. Those children who had come to WL having had a history of difficulty in other schools often brought with them a 'them and us' attitude to adults which puzzled the younger children and undermined the sincerity and give-and-take which the meetings required. Many children seemed to find it difficult to form an independent judgement on issues under discussion, preferring to 'take sides' with their friends [32].

For some youngsters these meetings were a valuable learning experience. They learned, for example, how to command the attention of a turbulent gathering; how to use diplomacy and tact; how to argue a case; how to sort out relevant considerations from irrelevant ones; how to disarm bullies; how to perceive ways out of predicaments and formulate workable solutions. For them the shortcomings of the meetings were not an obstacle to learning, but rather an opportunity for learning how to operate effectively in a difficult environment. But for the majority of children the meetings were frustrating and something to get over with as quickly as possible. Under these conditions it cannot be said that 'self government' was being realised in any meaningful sense.

A question often asked by visitors to WL was whether the kids meetings took reckless decisions which adults would be obliged to over-rule in the interests of common sense. In fact this hardly ever happened. Formally the only limits on the powers of the kids meetings were stated in the *Principles of Operation* (see page 302): "The meeting cannot take decisions which contravene these principles of operation,

or that affect the long-term stability or financial viability of the school." This clause could be interpreted quite widely: for example, any decision which could bring WL a bad reputation could be said to 'affect the long-term stability of the school.'

Two factors which kept the kids meeting in check were the presence of that core of children who had a strong commitment to the school and a clear understanding of its purposes; and the presence of all the workers. Workers did talk a great deal at kids meetings: they really did have to argue their cases to the children. Often children tired of arguing with workers, and deferred grudgingly. But often the workers were themselves divided on an issue - it is a mark of the open-ness of WL that workers were able to air their differing viewpoints in front of the children.

Potentially reckless decisions were also prevented by the consensus system. There was no voting in kids meetings, and a decision could not be reached until everyone concurred (albeit grudgingly). Consensus means that no-one will get their way all the time. It requires a spirit of compromise and a willingness to give ground unless a crucial principle is at stake. Workers were willing to give ground, and so were the children. In these circumstances it was usually possible to arrive at a conclusion which was tolerably acceptable to everyone. I recollect only one decision which I felt was seriously damaging: it was a decision to expel a particular child after a series of kids meetings had brought a catalogue of complaints against him. Because this child had a long history of rejection, the workers used procedural devices to avoid implementing the decision. In effect the workers over-ruled the kids meeting. [33]

If 'reckless decisions' were not a problem, the implementation of decisions presented great difficulties. It will be worth giving a detailed example because it brings to life the dilemmas of democracy in a free school. It was early on agreed at WL that everyone who ate dinners should be on the washing-up rota. On a typical day the adult on the rota would say "Dave, Chuck and Vera: it's our turn to wash up today." Little Dave would come into the kitchen and make a start on the job. But Chuck and Vera would say "We're not doing it" and disappear from sight. Now Chuck and Vera had been present at the kids meeting which agreed the washing up arrangements, but as was often the case, the burden of making sure the meeting's agreement was implemented fell upon the workers. Some adults were able to catch up with Vera and Chuck and prevail upon them to wash up. Others were less effectual. Typically the matter would go back to the next kids meeting, which would resolve that if Vera and Chuck didn't wash up, they shouldn't receive any more dinners. But then workers were put into the position of having to enforce *this* decision - waiting at the serving hatch, trying to stop Vera and Chuck from grabbing a dinner. Chuck would now relent: "OK, I'll wash up after dinner today, so let me eat first." Workers, feeling a little guilty about denying food to a hungry child (and conscious that the ILEA had paid for Chuck's dinner, and that Chuck's Mum thought the policy of 'no wash up, no dinner' was wrong - why didn't the school hire proper kitchen staff?) agreed to this settlement. But when he'd finished his dinner, Chuck would make for the door - he did not intend to keep his side of the bargain. Once again workers were pushed into an enforcing role.

Workers found themselves in such predicaments every day. Apart from anything else, it was exhausting. Many people would probably think that Chuck was just a naughty boy who needed a firm hand to put him right.

But the free school approach was to talk the matter over with Chuck and, if it was thought likely to help, with his parents. Perhaps Chuck could be persuaded to start giving reasons for his refusal: "Kids in other schools don't have to wash up. Norman never washes up and you don't stop *him* having dinners. My Mum says people should get paid to wash up - you get paid, so you should do it." This opens the way to a valuable discussion, and with unlimited time and energy, the conscientious free school worker could make some headway. Arguably, this is the best way to handle the problem. But in the free school time and energy were not unlimited. It was a physical impossibility to tackle every difficulty in this ideal way.

It might be asked where the other children were when all this was going on: did they not put pressure on Chuck to do his washing up? Unhappily, the children who were prepared (or able) to take on this responsibility were always in a minority, and even they had to choose their targets carefully: little children could be pressured easily enough, but many older ones were liable to respond aggressively.

This washing up saga illustrates that there is more to democracy than making decisions. Text-books on government point to the need for executive and judicial structures as well as legislative structures. At WL the meetings took the role of the judiciary (although this was not without its difficulties: with the accused sitting on the jury, a unanimous decision was not always reached easily), but questions of the executive and 'policing' were never clarified. Matters of authority, responsibility and power are involved which cannot be sufficiently determined by the simple establishment of a *decision-making* structure. These issues of authority, responsibility and power were discussed constantly by free school workers but I think it is fair to say that no

clear statement about them was ever formulated.

As far as the decision-making process is concerned, WL has arrived through experience at a pragmatic approach to kids meetings which does not match up to the ideals of 'self-government' but may be the best that can be achieved in practice [34]. It is to allow the kids meeting as much decision-making power as it is capable of bearing at any time. Sometimes, when meetings are disorderly, badly attended, or dominated by bullies, this responsibility will be small and decision-making will revert largely to the evening meetings. At other times, when the kids meetings are at their best, they can take considerable power. What is clear - and this is where the rhetoric of free schooling has had to be abandoned - is that only the workers can exercise the oversight of this. In other words, guardianship of the democratic process rests ultimately with the workers. Their task is to invite - and teach - others to share in this responsibility, always working towards the ideal but prepared to accept disappointments and imperfection.

To say that WL's aim of involving children in formal decision-making has not been completely realised is not the same thing as saying that children at WL were therefore deprived of power. In the day-to-day life of the school the children exercised a great deal of power. Although WL wished to repudiate the popular label 'the do-as-you-please school', the reality was that very largely children did do as they pleased. But their power was exercised individually and often capriciously. It was power to say 'no', but not much power to say what else instead. Although children could act spontaneously to determine the course of immediate events, their power was rarely exercised in an organised, deliberate way which could transform the context within which events took place.

Whatever the formal decisions reached at meetings - whether kids meetings or evening meetings - decisions often seemed to have a muted effect on the direction of the school. WL seemed to have a life of its own which was largely impervious to policy decisions. Thus the meeting could decide that everyone must share the washing up, and could decide on sanctions to be taken against those who failed to do so. But such a decision wouldn't change things very much. Before the decision, it was the adults who did the washing up with the assistance of those children who could easily be cajoled into helping. After the decision, it was much the same (at least, after a brief 'honeymoon' period when everyone tried extra hard to make the decision stick). This pattern could be observed over and over again. When a problem was perceived (children playing with pointed sticks for example, or little children going out into the street) the WL method was to bring it to a meeting. Usually the problem would be discussed and an agreement reached ('No pointed sticks allowed in school'; 'children under ten not allowed out on their own'). When I arrived at WL in 1979 there was a list of 72 such agreements pinned to the wall. In fact many of these agreements were regularly disregarded. The profusion of rules was indicative of an attempt to create order in a potentially chaotic situation. But even if all the explicit agreements had been adhered to, it was impossible to legislate agreements to deal with every conceivable contingency.

This suggests that WL had underlying problems of *order* which 'democracy' could not cope with. This takes us close to the heart of the difficulty of free schooling. Unfortunately it is too big a subject for me to tackle here [35].

While WL had the aim of being democratic, it also had the aim of putting into practice certain educational ideals. The founders of the school were strongly committed to certain moral and educational values, and by and large these values were shared by the workers who replaced them in subsequent years. In effect these values had to be non-negotiable, otherwise the whole purpose of the free school might have been lost. And yet on paper a democratic apparatus existed through which parents and children could, with workers, determine the aims and policies of the school. The founders did recognise the possibility that a democratic community might move away from the founding ideas:

> Our vision of the ideal community school is far from realisation - and will quite likely never materialise in the form we envisage. It must be firmly understood by us that we may be entirely taken by surprise by what transpires.[36]

and

> ...the 'Free School Philosophy' is not at all definitive. It is simply an attempt to see what kind of school, if any, might be appropriate to this changing world.[37]

What was unclear was how the school would deal with the tensions which would arise if parents and children wanted something different of the school from what the founders had had in mind. Such potential tensions certainly existed. It was common to hear parents say things like:

> Discipline is not good enough in the school. We're not strict enough. I know it goes against all your principles, but you need to do it for your own good. I think you can have freedom with discipline.[38]

or

> You should get some children helping you look after the place. You should make them. That's what they go to school for, to be told what to do and what not to do. If they can't... take some privileges away, deprive them of something. It's the only way, isn't it? It's better than hitting with this lot. They should be made to do their reading and writing, that's essential. That's something in life you've got to have, being able to learn.[39]

There *was* often a difference between what many parents thought was right and what the workers (or a majority of them) thought was right. But significantly, these divergences rarely came to a head in a democratic forum: parents did not attempt to use the meetings to translate their ideas about the school ('You should be more strict', 'you should punish the children', 'you should make them do their reading and writing') into changes of policy [40]. Interestingly, the only concerted challenge to the school's founding principles came in 1985, from the workers who, with the participation of some parents, attempted to re-write the school's *Principles of Operation* (see next page). This raised, in sharp form, the question of who, if anybody, was empowered to alter the school's key principles. The question at issue was whether WL's workers, parents and children constituted a community which was democratic *within* the parameters laid down by the school's founding principles, or whether the school community's powers extended to determining those parameters for themselves. This led to something of a constitutional crisis in 1985 and 1986 which was resolved, at least temporarily, by the intervention of 'the stooges' and senior ILEA officers, and the resignation from the school of all the workers who had supported the re-written principles.

This incident raises the question of the limits of democracy, and I want to conclude this chapter by summarising the constraints to which the free school was subjected. We can divide these contraints into formal and informal ones, and broader socio-cultural factors.

Formal Constraints

1. I have referred already to the *Principles of Operation*, a document drawn up in 1977 (although subsequently amended in minor ways). It was

Our Principles of Operation

The White Lion Street Free School sets out to meet basic social and educational needs, including the teaching of basic skills, for those living in its catchment area.

While the school aims to be flexible and informal, in the first five years certain principles of operation have been agreed, which those working in the school are expected to accept, and which cannot be changed except by unanimous decision by both the meeting and the meeting of the Council.

These are:
The school cannot charge fees for its basic activities; this does not prevent it from asking for contributions towards the cost of certain activities (eg. residential trips, horse-riding etc.). The amount of these contributions should be decided by the school meeting.

There are to be regular meetings (normally weekly), with an open agenda and open to children attending the school, part-time and full-time voluntary workers (all of whom have been appointed by the school meeting) and parents of children attending. They are to be the main decision making meetings of the school.

The legal framework of the school, bye-laws and regulations affecting fire and health precautions and the requirement that the school and its users should be adequately insured may limit the decision making powers of the meeting. The meeting cannot make decisions which contravene these principles of operation, or that affect the long-term stability or financial viability of the school.

Children will be encouraged, but never forced, to take part in learning activities.

The full-time workers are to be paid equally (with possible allowances to be agreed by them for particular personal responsibilities eg. dependant children and necessary additional expenses.) Money earned through promoting the ideas embodied in the school (eg. speaking and media fees etc.) are to be paid to the school.

All workers agree that they will not hit children or use physical violence. If they do, they will resign immediately and the parents of the child/children concerned will be told what happened. We recognise that there are times when mild physical force such as pushing may be used in order to prevent children and/or adults hurting themselves or others. Physical violence by any other member of the school community against another will be discouraged and when possible prevented.

Punishment will be avoided. This is not to prevent positive measures being used to protect people and their ability to make full use of the school, and to recover or replace stolen or damaged property without violating the legal rights of individuals.

Records or reports written about children, their parents and others will be shown to the subjects of them, who will also have the right to challenge and if necessary, correct anything in them. The persons about whom the report is written will have the right to control who else, apart from school workers sees these records. We will press for attendance and representation of children and families at case conferences and other meetings.

In deciding which school age children should join the school, there should be no selection based on individual histories or characteristics, if the general criteria are satisfied (eg. living within the catchment area and maintaining a rough age and sex balance in the school). Applicants aged 14 and over will be admitted subject to the decision of the full-time workers. Children who have joined the nursery (aged 3 to 5) but who live outside the catchment area may be refused a place in the school when they reach school age if it is full.

A condition of school-age children being on the Free School roll is that they attend the school (or other approved activities) for a period which corresponds to the legal minimum attendance at maintained schools. When they do not, after a reasonable period of warning them and their parents (including warning in writing) they may be taken off the roll and the local education office informed.

intended to establish a set of constraints within which the school would operate. Although the content of this document has been a matter of debate ever since 1977, as has the question of who, if anybody, would be entitled to amend it, it has been generally agreed that the school does need some kind of statement which defines its philosophy and which all those proposing to come to the school, whether as workers, children or parents, are required to accept as given.

It may be that a distinction can be drawn between a 'free school', at least as conceptualised by WL, and a 'community school': in the former case the inalienable principles are those of libertarian education; in the latter case, the inalienable principle is the right of the community to direct its own affairs.

2. We have already seen that WL, when it was an independent school, was legally controlled by the company, First London Free School Ltd. Whether or not the company, in the form of 'the stooges', chose to leave the running of the school to the meetings (which, unless they were also parents, the 'stooges' did not attend), the legal responsibility for the school rested with the company. If at any time 'the stooges' had felt that decisions of the meetings were liable to bring them into conflict with the law, they would clearly have been obliged to intervene. When, in 1982, the school joined ILEA, it was agreed that the school should have a 'Committee of Management' which would play an analogous role to that of governors in a conventional school. This Committee of Management would have constituted a formal constraint on the school, but in fact by 1987 the ILEA had not yet established it.

3. As we saw in chapter 4, Her Majesty's Inspectorate have a responsibility for general oversight of independent schools. In fact HMI's never intervened in any prescriptive way in WL, but they could have done if they had felt that something seriously wrong was going on there.

4. Since 1982, membership of ILEA has imposed a number of constraints on the school. The ILEA inspectorate have the responsibility for overseeing the educational work of the school (although their *powers* are unclear in this unique case). There are a great number of ILEA policies, regulations and procedures to which all its schools must conform. Opinions vary as to how much these regulations and requirements have affected WL. Some believe that they have been insidious and damaging; others feel they have, as constraints, had a minimal impact. I am not in a position to adjudicate between these claims.

5. The law imposes a variety of constraints on any school, including independent schools. These were reviewed in WL's pamphlet *How to Set Up a Free School*. From the point of view of libertarian educators, the primary legal constraint is the law of compulsory school attendance. Some people believe that this alone renders impossible any truly libertarian experiment in education.

Informal Constraints

1. Journalists have a concept - 'auto-censorship' - to refer to a form of self-control based on their own assessment of the limits on 'what they can get away with'. Something similar operated at WL. For example, WL was aware of the need to have a tolerably good reputation, and of

its vulnerability to criticisms and attacks from outside. This awareness - sometimes made explicit, sometimes not - conditioned some of the school's policy-making.

2. Potentially the school's sources of finance (chiefly, charitable trusts and the London Borough of Islington) in its independent years could have attached conditions to their financial support. In fact they very rarely did so (one exception was the insistence by the London Borough of Islington in 1982 that the nursery should charge fees.) But the school had to be cognisant of the need to raise money and therefore be approved by at least some of the grant-aiding bodies.

3. The values of individuals involved in the school - as distinct from the ideas formally stated in the *Principles of Operation* - were a powerful factor influencing the kind of decisions which could be reached. It was a characteristic of discussions at WL that principles of ethics and justice, as well as educational principles, were always to the forefront. For example, it was the policy of the school in 1979 that if a criminal offence was committed by a child attending the school, and it was known to the workers, the workers would not give the name of the child to the police. This was based on the belief that the treatment the child would receive from the police would be likely to cause more harm than good, although there was also an element of not wanting to endanger the trusting relationships which workers sought to build with the children.

4. A sensitivity to what parents wanted or would tolerate also imposed constraints on the school. For example, it was known that one parent - at least - was strongly opposed to nude sun-bathing on school

expeditions to the sea-side. Although the meeting never formulated a policy on this, nude sun-bathing was not on the whole encouraged.

5. There was a sensitivity too to the local community. Like all free schools, WL sought acceptance by the local community and was aware that to do so would occasionally require the school to trim its sails to suit local susceptibilities.

6. The abilities of the workers imposed a different kind of constraint on the school. What workers were willing and able to do, and what their own personal interests were, tended to delimit the organised activities available to children. I will discuss this further in the next chapter.

7. The school building imposed considerable constraints, some of which were barely tolerable. The small size of the rooms, for instance, meant that in the main activities had to be small-group ones. The lack of attractive open play space severely curtailed the children's opportunities for constructive free play.

8. Finally, we should remember the internal dynamics of the school: the 'life of its own' I mentioned on page 299. The constraint here was imposed by what the children would comply with: not just a verbal compliance, which was relatively easy to obtain at kids meetings, but an actual compliance in practice. Thus the meeting once decided that every older child should keep a personal record book. Whatever the merits of the idea, few older children actually did it. After a few weeks workers tired of having to nag the children, often to no avail, to fill in their record books. Although the children had agreed to the policy, in practice they over-ruled it. Similarly, the children

frequently agreed that each person should clear up any mess they had made, but this rarely happened without a great deal of adult nagging.

Socio-cultural Constraints

In addition to the constraints which were specific to WL, there is a set of external constraints which have been extensively explored by sociologists of education. I have in mind here the social, cultural and economic factors which influence people's behaviour in subtle but pervasive ways. Thus what people bring to school, and what they do there, is influenced by factors such as class, culture and ideology, to mention only the best known.

A minor example concerns food: workers at WL always felt that dinners offered an opportunity to introduce children to healthier nutritional habits. But few children could be shifted from their preference for baked beans, fish fingers and greasy chips. If we understand eating habits as *culturally* determined, we can understand that changing them is a much larger task than merely offering children a 'better' alternative. It isn't a matter of whether this food tastes nicer than that food, because many children would refuse even to *taste* dishes which were unfamiliar to them.

It would make a fascinating study to investigate how such socio-cultural constraints impinged upon life at WL. Workers were aware that such forces were at work, and often discussed them in general terms. More specifically, the school's allocation system (see page 344) has been described as a research programme intended to discover the socio-cultural constraints at work [41]. But I think it may be fair to say

that the school was never clear what to do in the face of these forces. This is hardly a criticism, since, to my knowledge, *no-one* has solved this problem, within free schooling or within conventional schooling. The point I would want to draw out, however, is that free schools may have underestimated the power of these forces, and therefore overestimated the scope they would have for setting up a radically different kind of education within their four walls.

There are a number of conclusions to be drawn from this chapter, but I will postpone them to the next chapter where I will look at the questions of freedom and of learning, before moving to an assessment of the WL experiment.

NOTES

1. I understand that there is further documentation stored elsewhere, but I have not been able to look at it.

2. The literature published by White Lion consists of White Lion Street Free School *Bulletins* 2 to 5; *How to Set Up a Free School; and Why ILEA Should Not Fund the Free School (and Why it Should)*. See also Peter Newell and Alison Truefitt 'Abolishing the Curriculum and Learning Without Exams' in Peter Buckman (ed) *Education Without Schools*; All at White Lion Street Free School 'Community School on the Way' in David Head (ed) *Free Way to Learning*; The White Lion Street Free School 'A Free School 'Curriculum'' in Geoff Whitty and Michael Young (eds) *Explorations in the Politics of School Knowledge*. There have also been a considerable number of shorter articles written by members of the school in various newspapers and periodicals.

3. Terry Ellis and others *William Tyndale: The Teachers' Story*. See also John Gretton and Mark Jackson *William Tyndale: Collapse of a School - or a System?*

4. Colin Fletcher, Maxine Caron and Wyn Williams *Schools on Trial*.

5. For example Gerard Holmes *The Idiot Teacher*; R.G.Gregory *Ring Your Own Bloody Bell*; R.F.Mackenzie *State School*; Leila Berg *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School*; Herbert Kohl *The Open Classroom*; Jonathan Kozol *Death at an Early Age*; R.F.Mackenzie *The Unbowed Head*; Philip Toogood *The Head's Tale*.

6. This was, at any rate, the *spirit* of the ILEA decision to fund the school. For administrative reasons - particularly that it would have been necessary to obtain the consent of the Secretary of State if the Authority was to maintain a new school, a consent unlikely to be forthcoming given falling rolls and Sir Keith Joseph's attitude to free schooling - WL is now designated as a 'centre'; formally it is an adjunct of local schools.

7. See White Lion Street Free School *Application to ILEA for Funding 1982* (unpublished).

8. In some measure this had been the practice at the Barns School - see W.David Wills *The Barns Experiment* pages 13, 75 and chapter X.

9. These were the figures in 1981. See White Lion Street Free School *Why ILEA Should Not Fund the Free School (and Why it Should)* page 13.

10. Since 1982 the ILEA has required the school to have five qualified teachers and one qualified nursery assistant. Other staff need not be qualified.

11. On the basis of personal knowledge I estimate this at over 80 per cent.

12. The statistics given in this chapter are drawn from WL school records.

13. *The Guardian* 13 October 1987.

14. See George Dennison *The Lives of Children* page 10.

15. See for example Ann McNiff 'Delta Free School' in *New Era* Vol 59 No 1, February 1978, page 199.

16. The pay of WL workers expressed as a percentage of national average weekly earnings at mid-years was: 1973 - 45%; 1974 - 44%; 1975 - 40%; 1976 - 41%; 1977 - 36%; 1978 - 67%; 1979 - 69%; 1980 - 56%; 1981 - 59%; 1982 - 60%; 1983 - 76%; 1984 - 71%; 1985 - 79%; 1986 - 72%.

When the school became funded by ILEA in 1982 the school received five teachers' (Scale 2) salaries, one nursery assistant salary and one instructor's salary, plus some payment (to First London Free School Limited) in lieu of part-time administrative and school-keeping staff. These salaries were pooled by the workers, and part of the pool was donated to the company to employ two or three extra workers. All workers received the same salary so that even teachers who were notionally on Scale 2 took home little more than half the Burnham salary.

A number of other schools have attempted to by-pass the differentials laid down by Burnham agreements by pooling salaries and then re-distributing them amongst the staff. A number of difficult problems concerning income tax, superannuation, National Insurance contributions, and entitlement to benefits based on National Insurance contributions, arise which WL has not been able to solve. Those participating in the pool lose out in various, and differing, ways in terms of over-payment of (non-recoverable) taxes and reduced entitlement to state benefits.

17. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin* 3, page 30.

18. Karen McDaid interviewed by Graham Wade in *The Guardian* 6 August 1985.

19. John Holt *Freedom and Beyond* page 52.

20. Interview with parent. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin* 5, page 25.

21. Dave Morley and Charles Landry (eds) *What a Way to Run a Railroad.*

22. White Lion Street Free School *Project Working Group* (unpublished) page 2.

23. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 5*, page 31.

24. A.S. Neill interview with Mark Vaughan (in WL files).

25. A.S. Neill *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* page 55.

26. Interview with Alison Truefitt 1 October 1986.

27. This is described in Ray Hemmings *Fifty Years of Freedom.*

28. Matthew Davenport Hill *Plans for the Government and Liberal Instruction of Boys in Large Numbers Drawn from Experience* page ix.

29. The description which follows of kids meetings at WL is open to the charge of being subjective. I have shown it to a wide range of workers and former workers at the school and all have accepted it as fair. However, it remains open to the charge of being an adult perspective which fails to take into account 'the point of view of the child'.

30. Interview with Susie Powlesland, co-founder of Kirkdale School, 30 August 1986.

31. A.S. Neill *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* page 52.

32. A note I made whilst working at WL reads as follows: "It is interesting to observe the kids meeting. When a question is posed, adults, who already have an opinion on this question (or can easily construct one in a few seconds), don't realise that most kids may not have *any* opinion on this question. Opinions for children are like clothes - you may take one lot off and the next day appear in a completely new lot. What happens, then, is that one kid who *does* have an opinion on the subject voices it. If that kid is trusted and respected by the other kids, this then becomes their opinion. (Sometimes the frustrated adults persuade the chairperson to go round

the room asking each individual to state their own view. This is invariably a litany of repetition of what the first person had said)."

33. The reader may wonder what happened to consensus in this instance. To cut a long story short, the workers were divided at the kids meeting and, feeling that they needed to discuss the issue amongst themselves, those who were opposed to the proposed expulsion 'concurred grudgingly', at the end of a very long meeting, to the majority. At the evening meeting the workers agreed to defer the expulsion by procedural means.

34. W. David Wills's experience led him to a similar position: "We rarely use the phrase 'self-government' because it is not self-government, and I very much doubt whether there is any school where - if the adults are quite honest with themselves - there is complete self-government." *The Barns Experiment* page 43. Wills preferred the term 'shared responsibility'.

35. Relevant to this is Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis's discussion of 'revolutionary education' - see *Schooling in Capitalist America* pages 270 to 274.

36. All at White Lion Street Free School 'Community School on the Way' in David Head (ed) *Free Way to Learning* page 55.

37. The White Lion Street Free School 'A Free School 'Curriculum'' in Geoff Whitty and Michael Young *Explorations in the Politics of School Knowledge* page 180.

38. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin* 4, page 22.

39. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin* 5, pages 24-25.

40. Although I cannot pursue the idea here, it is possible that WL, quite unconsciously, 'disposed' of parents' views in the way perceptively described by Jonathan Kozol *Death at an Early Age* page 97.

41. Interview with Alison Truefitt 13 November 1987.

7

CHAPTER 7

WHITE LION STREET FREE SCHOOL - PART II

To continue with my study of White Lion Street Free School (WL) I want now to look at certain aspects of the question of freedom. I will then look at learning at WL. After that I consider how the WL experiment may be evaluated, and I end the chapter by outlining some of the pointers towards successful radical practice that have arisen from WL's experience.

FREEDOM

In chapter 4 I discussed the libertarian theory of non-intervention (pages 212 ff) and it is against that background that I will be considering how WL approached 'freedom' and how this approach worked out in practice.

WL was clear that 'freedom' was not just a matter of abolishing constraints:

> ...this freedom is not a simple thing. It is not, contrary to the stereotype which the words 'free school' have come to suggest, merely a negative freedom. It is not simply a matter of lifting the constraints of mass schooling, though that is an essential condition... freedom must have positive dimensions too. It must be the freedom the make significant choices between positive activities... If such choices, in great variety and closely geared to the children's own experiences of life were not available, 'freedom' we believe would be a meaningless - perhaps destructive - gift.[1]

Although WL aimed to minimise the constraints on children - for example by denying adults any institutional power over children, by making no

activities compulsory, by being non-coercive, and by allowing children extensive freedom of movement - many constraints did remain. Chief amongst these were the rules reached by agreement of the meetings (although, as I suggested in the last chapter, there were difficulties in enforcing these agreements); and there were the other constraints I listed in the last chapter.

How did WL children use this freedom the school gave them? Very early on the school discovered that there were going to be difficulties. In the view of one of the first workers:

> One of the great paradoxes of the free school was that the freedom as used by them was not used for things we wanted them to do.[2]

As a way of examining this 'paradox' I want to consider two examples of things which workers did not want children to do: one was bullying, the other was damage to the school environment.

Bullying has been a persistent problem at WL. Whilst there is no reason for thinking that there was more bullying per capita at WL than at other schools, many children (and adults) would feel that freedom was of doubtful value if it meant that their daily lives were full of fear. The fact is that significant numbers of children left WL because they could not put up with the bullying. The WL experience did, at times, seem to be lending weight to the '*Lord of the Flies*' theory of what happens when children are left to themselves.

Of course the workers did not blithely ignore this problem. It was high on the agenda of many meetings, and adults constantly worked at strategies to reduce the amount of bullying. But no effective strategy was discovered. When in 1985 the workers decided on a series of measures to tackle the problem, including the ultimate sanction of

expulsion when all else had failed, they were opposed by some of 'the stooges' who argued that the school exists to serve all of its children. As the School of Barbiana had said, writing of 'boys the teachers don't want':

> We, too, soon found how much harder it is to run a school with them around. At times the temptation to get rid of them is strong. But if we lose them, school is no longer school. It is a hospital which tends to the healthy and rejects the sick. It becomes just a device to strengthen the existing differences to a point of no return.[3]

The argument was that the bully is asking for help, and the school should answer. Instead of rejecting the bully, the school's job is to find ways of meeting his or her needs.

The counter view asked how long one can go on trying but failing to meet a child's needs before, in the interests of the other children, you concede that the school has failed in this case. As A.S.Neill had put it: "One simply cannot sacrifice other children to one problem child" [4].

There is a real dilemma here. How anguishing it can be was well portrayed by George Dennison who, in *The Lives of Children*, described how the First Street School in New York reluctantly moved to the decision to expel a bully [5]. Although one school may 'solve' a problem by expelling a bully, it has to be asked what becomes of the bully after that - and whose job it is to worry about it.

Now my discussion may appear to have strayed somewhat from a consideration of the issue of 'freedom', but there is a valuable point to be made here. It is possible to have abstract discussions of 'freedom' which keep more or less 'to the subject'. But when we begin to consider 'freedom' in a concrete context we find that all kinds of other questions are drawn in. This is one of the reasons why I wished

to include consideration of a concrete context - WL - in this study. As I shall argue in chapter 9, radical theory must differ significantly from orthodox theory in that it relates the questions it discusses to concrete experience. And this means that it inevitably strays outside orthodox 'subject' boundaries.

Another constant problem at WL was destruction of the school environment. Sometimes children would go through rooms like whirlwinds, throwing everything on the floor, upsetting furniture, smashing crockery, tearing up books, breaking fittings, spilling liquids. (Sometimes this was deliberate: more often it was a by-product of wild play. As we have seen, one of WL's specific problems was that it had no space where youngsters could have such play). It became necessary to lock rooms when they were not in use, and workers went around with great bunches of keys. (Children exercised their creative powers by trying to steal the keys). Even the most responsible children could not be left on their own to work or play in a room unless they were tough enough to repel invaders. Hence it became unusual for children to work on their own - or to use resources for constructive play. The school's specialist rooms - pottery, art rooms, dark room, book room, science room, music room - ought to have been ideal spaces for children to pursue their own interests. But the rooms had to be locked when adults weren't in them: as well as the devastating messes, there were constant thefts which left the school bereft of utilisable materials and equipment.

Maurice Punch has suggested that the freedom of free schools can create a vacuum which is filled by the more aggressive youngsters whose behaviour becomes

> ... a serious infringement on the liberty of other children to play, to work, or generally do their own thing... it is so easy for the

> pupil society to congeal into a sort of ritualised non-conformity that is rigorously enforced... A sort of collective super-ego can develop that makes deviance from the done thing perhaps more difficult than in the conventional school...
>
> Having removed one set of constraints, have they [ie free schools] the self-perception, and the courage, to recognise that they have merely opened the way for an alternative set of constraints? [6]

I sometimes got the feeling at WL that the outcome of freedom was not equality and fraternity, or sorority, but the emergence of a new aristocracy - cliques of youngsters whose attitude was that nothing need be done if they didn't feel like it, that all resources were at their exclusive disposal (and disposal was what they often did with resources) and that anyone who got in their way was to be brushed aside.

But such personal feelings do not tell the whole story. WL did find that some children were capable of making positive use of a great deal of freedom, even if their chances of doing so were often thwarted by other children who were not so constructive. It would be interesting to know what it was about the children which caused them to differ in this way. Was it their backgrounds? Or their upbringing? Or cultural factors? Or psychological factors? Although it is easy to invent hypotheses, I will not pursue them here. But it is worth noting that at WL the distinction between children who could make positive use of freedom and those who could not was *not* related to social class [7]. The experience of WL would not support the claim, sometimes heard, that 'free schooling is alright for middle class children but not for working class children'.

WL's experience, that many children did not make the kind of use of freedom which workers expected, has been interpreted in a number of

differing ways. One view is that WL spoiled its chances by taking too many 'difficult children'. A parent who was closely involved with the school for many years expressed the opinion that:

> I think they've taken an unfair share of really problem kids, and it affects milder kids in the school.[8]

Even workers who disputed this (and there were some, although I do not know if it was a majority) agreed that the experience of children prior to coming to WL had damaged them (or at least conditioned them) in a way which made it difficult for them to adjust to the freedom of the school. As we have seen, A.S.Neill became less and less inclined to accept 'difficult' children. A proposal that WL should move in this direction was made as part of a package of reforms drawn up by the workers in 1985. They suggested a screening process (interviews and other means) to assess which applicants were likely to make good use of the school and which applicants had problems which the school would not be in a position to help with. This, it was hoped, would produce a more balanced intake. The proposal was rejected by 'the stooges', both on grounds of principle (especially the principle that children should never be labelled) and because they doubted whether it would be possible to predict in advance which children would flourish at WL and which would not.

A second view is that the behaviour of children at WL was typical of the behaviour of inner-city youngsters, and that a free school could not hope to escape it. This may be so, but the founders of WL were aspiring to something more than a replication of inner-city norms. Whether WL 'bit off more than it could chew' by setting up in a 'tough' area of inner London must remain an open question.

A third view, which was assiduously advanced by one WL parent, holds that the difficulties WL experienced (such as bullying and damage to the school) should not be interpreted as problems. In this view it is a mistake to see bullying and destruction as bad things. Bullying is neither good nor bad, but is acceptable if it teaches the bullied to stand up for themselves, and if it allows the bullies to work their problems out of their systems. Similarly, this view sees it as admirable that at WL children were able to act out their destructive impulses without bringing down dreadful vengeance upon themselves. If they wanted to smash things up then clearly they had a need to smash things up and therefore WL, being a place where they could do this, was meeting a need which was not met elsewhere. This view relies on a psychological presumption that acting out is necessarily therapeutic - a presumption which had a certain currency in the 1960s but which is not (to my knowledge) supported by any coherent school of psychological thought. Proponents of the presumption retort that all 'coherent' schools of psychology are manipulative and oppressive.

A fourth interpretation of WL's experience which has been expressed is that, bearing in mind that the libertarian theory of non-intervention expects an initial period of disorder until the children start to construct their own social order, WL has never got beyond the initial stage because of the constant turnover of children referred to in the last chapter [9]. There is some evidence for this proposition in that those children who have spent a long time at WL have often - but not in all cases - developed a constructive and responsible approach to school life. On the other hand it may be that they stayed a long time *because* they were disposed to make positive use of the school's freedom and therefore it was worth their while to stay on. The evidence which might help to settle this question has not been collected.

Finally, there are those who believe that WL made the mistake of giving *too little* freedom to the children. In their view, the constant intervention by 'over-anxious' adults undermined the essential dynamic of the process by which children establish their own just order. As Ray Hemmings has put it:

> ... interferences by the well-intentioned adult with the child's exploration of his world so often weaken that child's capability of making his own choices and of pursuing the consequences of his own decisions by which alone he would discover and create himself.[10]

Free school workers ought, in this view, to have been more prepared to follow Neill's prescription of 'watch and wait'. In fact WL's founders never did plan a 'do whatever you like, we won't interfere' place:

> There is no straightforward formula, and certainly not, contrary to popular conceptions of the Free School, a situation in which 'it is all left up to the children to decide for themselves'. Children do need to make 'real' decisions if they are going to learn to think for themselves, but they may also need help with this to begin with.[11]

But even if the school's founders had planned not to intervene at all in whatever the children did, it is as well to acknowledge the pressures operating against such a policy. On an immediately practical level, WL had severe problems of space, in contrast to the rural boarding schools. Playing in the wretched little back yard, or on the staircase, or in the kitchen, soon led to mischief which could hardly be overlooked. And there were external pressures. WL opened with much clamour and was aware that many eyes were upon it. By 1972, when it opened, progressive education was under fierce attack and there were critics all too keen to say that at free schools the children just mess around all day long. Within three years the popular press were hounding William Tyndale School, a little too close for comfort at just three-quarters of a mile from WL. Moreover, WL was conscious of the expectation of parents - and indeed of many of the children - that the workers should 'keep order'.

Whether WL would have solved some of its problems by giving children a freer rein to determine the course of events was never tested. But the experience from American free schools reported by Allen Graubard would not seem to support this view. That experience led Graubard to argue, in a passage which is worth quoting at length:

> ...the reaction against the authoritarianism of the public [ie state] schools and the central role of the all-powerful teacher is certainly well-founded. But the abstract polar opposite of not imposing anything on the kids is delusion. By being there, by being honest about who he is and what he cares about, the adult cannot help "loading the environment", influencing the young people, no matter how much he is committed to not initiating, planning, or in any way interfering with the children's own doings. More than that, the laissez-faire mode of "being there" is often a very serious value decision, for which the adult must assume responsibility. It is not simply a "letting be"; it is a conscious avoidance of doing and saying things that could very well affect the young people involved. It also projects a definite feeling about relationships, what it is to care and to take responsibility. The idea that not asserting oneself, not intervening and initiating even when one feels it is appropriate, is truly not to affect the unfolding of the child's growth and education is ideological, in a bad sense, and an avoidance of necessary choice and commitment, an avoidance that is itself a choice with consequences. [12]

Nagging

As we have seen, WL did not subscribe to any theory of 'absolute freedom' for children. Most (if not all) workers saw themselves as having an interventionist role. But there was often an ambivalence about this intervention. Consider these three statements made by the school:

> Ultimately, all learning activities in the school are optional, in that we do not apply any sanctions other than verbal nagging to persuade children to take part... We spend a lot of time discussing how much nagging is reasonable, whether it is unproductive etc.[13]

> The quite explicit expectation is that every child will come and do some basic skill work for some or all of the morning... this expectation is reinforced by the lack of many alternatives.[14]

> ... from the start, no Free School activity was ever compulsory... There is now a general understanding that everyone is supposed to do some basic skill work every morning. What that 'supposed' means is a matter of permanent discussion in the school.[15]

'Nagging' was the technique used by WL workers to get children to do things (or refrain from doing things) whilst pretending that the children were free to do otherwise. Children learned skilful responses to nagging. Georgia, for example, would shout "Who rattled your cage?" to which there is no known reply. The more articulate would stand and fight: "This is a free school, isn't it? I can do what I like." Others would simply run away.

There is some difficulty in squaring this cheerfully acknowledged nagging with the free schoolers' rhetoric of freedom. 'We do not apply any sanctions other than verbal nagging', but why should it be necessary to think of any sanctions at all if the school was happy with the policy that 'no Free School activity was ever compulsory'? And it could be argued that having decided to make a 'quite explicit expectation' then it is equivocation to say that it is optional. Indeed, to make a quite explicit expectation of a child and then insist that it is optional may undermine the trust between adult and child (or between any two people).

Children at WL experienced nagging as punitive, as this exchange illustrates:

> Worker: "Why are we here at the free school?"
> Michael: "To not be whipped".
> Tony: "Our school whips you in other ways, like nagging." [16]

It is hard to tease out the thought processes of workers at WL (and I was one of them) who did this nagging. But it does seem to represent an attempt to reconcile a theoretical belief in freedom for children with a practical conviction that there are some things which responsible adults must insist on. I am not sure that WL succeeded in making this reconciliation satisfactorily. A case has been made for making

'quite explicit expectations' concrete by making them non-negotiable and defining these as the boundaries within which children will be allowed freedom [17]. If one believes that it is right to have 'quite explicit expectations' then it is surely right to set up structures to ensure that these expectations are fulfilled. Perhaps this is what is involved when adults take on the responsibility for making a demarcation between 'freedom' and 'licence'. It is true that this means a departure from free school rhetoric ('children are involved in all decisions'; 'adults and children are equal'; 'nothing is compulsory') but I suggest that it is a better description of how most adults at WL would have wanted to work. And it would offer them one great advantage: adults would be relieved of that sense of guilt (which several WL workers have described to me) they felt every time they insisted that children must do this or must not do that. One long-standing worker has suggested that this uncertainty (about whether it was alright for adults to *insist* on certain things) relayed itself to the children who were thus confused about what was acceptable and what was not [18]. (A further example of this worker ambivalence is given on page 326 below).

A psychiatric social worker who was involved with several WL families expressed the opinion that the free school environment was an extremely difficult one for some children to deal with. Far from making few demands on the children (which was the superficial view of some critics), the free school made, in his view, demands which many children found almost impossible to handle. For example, many of the children coming to WL had problems of insecurity, but in important ways the school compounded their insecurity. The ambivalent attitude of adults towards freedom did not help. If workers said "the lessons here are optional" children would probably take this to mean that they didn't have to do them if they didn't want to. It would then be

confusing when a worker came along and started nagging them for not doing their lessons.

It may be that the children conceptualised 'free school' in a different way from the workers. It is possible that they had a different 'definition of the situation', to use Willard Waller's phrase [19]. Whereas conventional schools have mechanisms that ensure (or attempt to ensure) that the teachers' 'definition of the situation' prevails, WL had no such mechanisms. *No* definition of the situation prevailed, leading to an unfortunate vacuum: the situation was undefined. Whilst some people may thrive under such conditions, others find it frustrating and confusing.

If this hypothesis is correct, it is easy to see how the 'collective super-ego' referred to by Maurice Punch could develop, and how workers found this difficult to handle. At WL the children who wanted to make constructive use of the free school found themselves under pressure to conform to the non-constructive norms established by the majority. This is the reverse of what is supposed to happen in the libertarian theory of non-intervention. It is interesting that Parkfield Street Free School in Manchester decided to drop the name 'free school' because, amongst other reasons, "The kids used to take 'free school' as meaning... they could do anything they liked in it" [20].

It would be nice if I could offer some simple solution to the problems I have raised in this section. I can not. All I can hope is that my discussion will take the debate about 'freedom' and free schooling a step forward. As I suggested in chapter 4, this debate urgently needs a rigorous analysis of the concept of 'freedom'. By this I do not mean an abstract philosophical discourse, but a philsophically

rigorous attempt to analyse the concept of freedom *within the concrete context* of the problems we have been considering in this chapter.

LEARNING

In the next chapter I will be considering certain theoretical issues raised by the radical approach to learning. This section will 'set the scene' by looking at the process of learning at WL. As we shall see, this is of relevance to the theoretical discussion of the next chapter.

WL's approach was to get to know each child well, to identify their interests and needs, and then offer them a range of choices of optional and flexible 'positive learning activities'. In contrast to some other free schools, and some libertarian thinking, WL workers did consider it right to make a judgement that some learning activities are positive or worthwhile and some are not, although 'positive' and 'worthwhile' were much more broadly defined than they usually are by orthodox curriculum theorists [21].

It is an indication of the kinds of things which WL considered worthwhile that the school employed adults with specific specialisms. In 1980, for example, the chief specialisms of the workers were infant teaching, junior teaching, English, humanities, maths, science, drama, art, pottery, woodwork, photography, crafts and sports. Workers were able to go outside their specialisms, and if children expressed interest in activities which no worker felt able to organise, the school would recruit a part-time worker or a volunteer worker to do so. It was usually quite easy to find people to do this, although their abilities and persistence varied.

The theory, then, was that teachers would respond to the children's own interests. This is where difficulties began:

> Of course the aim was that the children would be all bursting with the desire to grow and explore and ask questions about this and that, and then they could be set on the trail of this or that delightful little educational project. But it wasn't like that at all. Following their own interests would often have meant cutting up an armchair or smashing milk bottles in the yard at the back, and on the whole we tried to discourage that.[22]

If children follow their own interests (in the sense of doing things which they find interesting) there comes a point at which someone must raise the question of how worthwhile these interests are. John Dewey's view was that

> The greater maturity of experience which should belong to the adult as educator puts him in a position to evaluate each experience of the young in a way in which the one having the less mature experience cannot do. It is then the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading. There is no point in his being more mature if, instead of using his greater insight to help organise the conditions of the experience of the immature, he throws away his insight.[23]

But there was a deep-seated ambivalence (here as elsewhere) in the WL workers' approach which is illustrated by these words in an article by two of the school's founders, where they take issue with R.S.Peters:

> How does Peters know that 'blowing up frogs with bicycle pumps' (the example he gives) is 'educationally undesirable'? Who is he to say that it is less desirable than, for example, the common practice of dissecting the poor frog? [24].

Now we may or may not agree that R.S.Peters is an unsuitable person to judge what is 'educationally desirable'; but there is just a hint here of a belief that *no-one* is a suitable person to make such a judgement. And indeed, in another WL article this hint becomes explicit. This article poses a set of questions (what kind of school does society need now? how might people learn the things you think they need? what do your own children need?) and then says:

> What would qualify you or any other individual or group to act on those answers?
> *Nothing* would. It is a fundamental characteristic of our fast-changing world that there is no agreement about what should be done, and so no basis for concerted action. But we cannot *do* nothing

because the younger generations... need help in coping with society.[25]

The ambivalence is plain to see here, in the form of a dilemma: *nobody* is qualified to make the necessary judgements, and yet we must do *something*, because the young need help. (But we might note a contradiction: nobody is qualified to say what youngsters 'need', yet it is certain they '*need* help'. At least Neill wouldn't have got himself into this contradiction, because he would have denied (in his more idealistic moments) that the young need help).

My suggestion is that while most WL workers subscribed to a notion of intelligent [26] or worthwhile activities, they also felt uneasy about doing so and, as a result, the school failed to develop structures and methods which would enable the children to have meaningful and sustained learning experiences. To understand this, it will be necessary to describe in detail how mornings were organised at WL (afternoons were different). Although the arrangements varied from time to time, I will describe them as they were in 1981.

Each adult was based in a specific room. On the top floor was an art room, a crafts room, a dark-room and a pottery, each staffed by a worker. In the mornings only one or two of these rooms were opened. (In the afternoons they were all opened). On the floor below were the 'blue room' which was reserved for five- to eight-year-olds, the 'middle group' room for nine- to twelve-year-olds, and two rooms for the older children (11 or 12 upwards). Each of these rooms was staffed by a worker whose morning responsibility was to do 'basic skills' work with their age range. In addition there were the art, science and music rooms, open to all ages. Part-timers (for example a French teacher)

would come in to do specific work with pre-arranged groups of children. And there was the nursery for the under-fives.

There was no fixed starting time for the day, but workers arrived by nine o'clock and would usually assemble in the ground-floor dining room for a cup of tea and a chat. Children would come in from nine o'clock onwards. Most would be in by ten o'clock, although some would rarely appear before noon.

The common practice was for adults to start soliciting 'customers' as the children came in ("Want to do some reading this morning Vera?"). By dint of fierce determination (and effective nagging) the worker responsible for the 'blue room' had established a firm routine that all five- to eight-year-olds would be based with her in the mornings. If they went elsewhere - to the art-room or the science room, say - it would be by arrangement with her. It was significant that this worker constantly felt uneasy about the purposeful way in which she directed the blue-room group. Periodically she raised at evening meetings the fear that she was contravening the school's ideals by, in effect, restricting the younger children's choices. This was an indication of a gap between the school's rhetoric ('all learning activities are optional', 'no free school activity is compulsory') and the practice which some individual workers felt was necessary. In fact her practice was not challenged at meetings.

With children over the age of eight or nine, much more nagging was needed:

> ... the question 'what do you want to do/learn here?' was often touched on in meetings, and was also the subject of frequent uneasy confrontations between teachers and children...[27]

There was always a small core of children who were content to 'do their work' in the mornings. (Often, but not in every case, their parents were exerting consistent moral pressure on them to do so). It was tempting for workers to tuck themselves away in their rooms with these small groups of keen children and forget the rest. The rest - always a majority - would normally resist the allurements of workers and spend their time 'hanging out'. Some would sit and chat and listen to their radio-cassettes. Others would play snooker in the basement. Yet others would rush energetically round the building making a lot of noise and causing disruption - by, for example, invading the nursery. A few would disappear from the building and not be seen again until dinner time. (Workers did not always know where they had gone). One or two might help to prepare dinner. One or two would find their way eventually into the art room or pottery and make something. And so the days and weeks would pass [28].

Workers were well aware of the apparent purposelessness of this majority. After an hour or so of working with the keen core, they might foray downstairs and try to persuade others to come and join the activities upstairs. Sometimes this might succeed, often not. A recalcitrant core would rarely engage in any focussed activity with an adult, and it was hard for most adults to perceive any worthwhile purpose in the activities they engaged in on their own.

On top of this sort of routine, proceedings would be regularly interrupted. A serious act of vandalism or bullying might call for an emergency meeting; workers would be called to receive urgent phone calls; a parent might come in with a pressing problem, or an irate shopkeeper with a complaint. A fight might break out between children,

or an individual child in distress might need private attention. Workers would receive requests to go and unlock the back room where valuable equipment was stored. Dinner had to be prepared, dangerous fittings repaired, messes cleared up. There might be a visit of fire officers or dignitaries from a charitable trust. And so forth.

From time to time attempts were made to introduce a system of timetabling: children were helped to draw up a personal timetable which set out which room they would be in at what time, doing what activity. Whilst this did help to create a little more structure, giving workers something to back up their nagging ('you said you'd do science at 11 o'clock') they tended to wither away. This was partly because children didn't stick to them, but partly because too often workers weren't where they said they'd be either - perhaps because of the interruptions mentioned above, or because of absence. (At certain periods of the school's life illness or exhaustion have been significant problems).

Sometimes the climate in rooms was too tempestuous for good work, once started, to be carried through. It was common, for example, for a small group to have started on an interesting project when a late-comer would arrive and say 'Did you see that film on TV last night?'; the project would grind to a halt. Some workers skilfully incorporated such diversions into their programmes and turned them to the advantage of the group. Others (myself included) were less adaptable, and such work as was done in their rooms proceeded in staccato bursts between interruptions.

Then there were running feuds between children. Vera would refuse to work in a room as long as Chuck was there. (Such feuds could be short-

lived: the next week Vera would refuse to work *unless* Chuck was there). More worryingly, children who felt anxious about their abilities, for example in reading, would refuse to do anything whilst other children were in the room. This could be - and was - constructively handled by providing private lessons, but at a cost of having to make provision for the other children at the time.

The wide range of ages and abilities and interests of children made it difficult to organise group work. It was therefore common to have, say, five children in a room each doing an entirely different thing. Because (contrary to the free school's hopes) few children seemed able to work on their own for more than a few minutes, this placed considerable demands on teachers. Children insisting on immediate attention would become frustrated and walk out. It was one of the paradoxes of WL that the intention to let the children direct their own learning contrasted with the heavy dependence of many children on adult help at every step.

This description of mornings at WL will not surprise those who are familiar with accounts of other free schools [29]. The fact that similar things happened in free schools from New York to Vancouver, from Manchester to London, suggests the possibility that there is a problem of free schooling which cannot be attributed to some specific weakness (such as an incompetent set of workers) within individual schools. At first sight, the problem common to all free schools seems to be a failure to deal with the routine administrative details which any school needs to sort out. But the pace of life at free schools was so frantic, the demands on staff so numerous and varied, the daily life of the schools so unpredictable, that even competent groups of workers found it extremely hard to get a grip on things.

In 1982 WL was visited for three days by three ILEA inspectors. Their report pointed to serious deficiencies even in the best work that they saw. Much of the work in the basic skills was trivial and routine. Written work was inadequate. Exercises in English usage and calculating skills predominated and there was little work which contributed to or stemmed from the many experiences which the school provided for the children (particularly in the afternoons). There was a lack of an overall view of the curriculum and links between different areas of work were not made. Freedom of choice was limited by the lack of a planned framework for the children's learning. Children were not being stretched. Older children tended to work on very traditional lines, even in their creative work. Work in history and geography was virtually non-existent. Few girls entered the science room. Work was fragmented, irregular and often incompleted. Children were not being encouraged to develop their powers of concentration nor seek to raise their own standards of performance.

WL might have dismissed these comments by asserting that the inspectors had misunderstood the aims and methods of the school. This was not, however, how the workers in 1982 reacted (except in certain particularities). The weaknesses pointed to by the inspectors were accepted as real weaknesses: it was no part of the aim of WL that work should be 'trivial and routine', for example, or that girls should do no science whilst boys did.

But the school was hoist on its own petard. The deficiencies the inspectors observed are precisely the kind of deficiencies which can arise when learning is not teacher-directed. (When learning *is* teacher directed, other deficiencies can arise, which the radicals had been fulsome in pointing out). It was, for example, difficult to dissuade

the older children that 'English' meant sentence-completion exercises and spelling tests, or that 'maths' meant sums. [30]

How to deal with these matters was the subject of very many evenings and weekends of discussion by the workers. Some workers were not greatly worried by the situation, believing that whatever the majority were getting up to was probably the best thing for them: these workers had faith in the innate ability of children to discern their own needs and act in their own best interests. Other workers felt unsure what to do for the best and were inclined to let things drift. But probably the majority of workers tried hard to develop new strategies and methods to capture the children's imaginations and enable them to become involved in a sustained programme of learning [31].

One example of this was a 'body week' when all normal activities were suspended and the workers planned a range of events and projects designed to promote learning about the human body in all its aspects. Contrary to the school's maxim (see page 368), teachers took the initiative on teaching method and content. There was general agreement that the children enjoyed the week and learned a good deal. But subsequent attempts to replicate this foundered when a 'multi-cultural week' ran up against entrenched racism amongst some of the youngsters, and a 'sports week' planned by the children themselves did not get off the ground. In any case, given all their other duties and responsibilities, the workers were not able to sustain the kind of effort which had gone into organising 'body week'.

What cannot be deduced from the foregoing discussion is that the children at WL learned less (or more) than they would have done at other schools, nor whether they learned different things at WL which

would have stood them in good stead in later life. I have not systematically gathered the empirical evidence upon which such an assessment might be based. This is the matter I will turn to shortly.

My own opinion is that WL did not create an effective learning environment, and that one of the reasons for this lies in the ambivalent messages given by the adults to the children. This in turn can be traced, in my view, to a lack of a clear theory of learning. That is the subject of the next chapter.

Others, however, who have been associated with WL believe that the theoretical approach was sound but that the school did not discover effective means of putting it into practice in the circumstances. Yet other feel that it is too easy to dwell on the problems that WL encountered and claim that most children fared better at WL than they would have done elsewhere. How might we assess these competing claims?

EVALUATING THE FREE SCHOOL EXPERIMENT

There has been a great deal of interest in WL in the 15 years since it opened. It has been estimated that the school has received more than 5,000 visitors in this time. These visitors were interested in the school's ideas but what many of them wanted to know was how well they worked out in practice.

The original intention was to monitor the experiment:

> We hope to have it fully documented (and evaluated as far as a small, informal unit can be), and thus act as the kind of radical experiment which could affect state school practice particularly in inner city areas.[32]

WL continued for a number of years to describe itself as an experiment, implying two things: one, careful and systematic observation in order to judge how the experiment was going with respect to established criteria (and in contrast to established controls); and, two, that the outcome could not be predicted with any certainty - that, indeed, the experiment might fail.

Unfortunately the original intention of evaluating the project was never put into effect. This was partly because the pressures of setting up and running the school left little time and energy for evaluation; partly because of the complexities of the task; and partly because the school did not manage to raise the funds which a proper evaluation would require. A number of attempts were made to launch an evaluation and on two occasions advanced proposals were drawn up. Both foundered when it proved impossible to fund them. The school has never adopted any systematic self-evaluation programme.

The only systematic records kept by WL are the attendance registers. The school, and individual workers, have kept various other records from time to time, and it might be possible for an industrious researcher to collect these to see if they might yield, for example, useful case-studies of individual children [33]. Between 1972 and 1981 WL published four substantial *Bulletins* [34] which reported on school life with an emphasis on organisational arrangements. Although well-produced and informative, they are of limited help to anyone who would like to make an impartial assessment of the free school experiment.

When WL was an independent school - from 1972 to 1982 - it was the responsibility of HMIs to keep an eye on the school. They visited from time to time, and no doubt satisfied themselves that nothing positively

harmful was going on. But their impressions of the school are not publicly available. There was a full HMIs inspection of the school in January 1974 by three inspectors who stayed for three-and-a-half days. I have not been able to obtain a copy of their report, but in any case HMI reports prior to 1983 were confidential and their contents could not be disclosed. WL's *Bulletin* 3 revealed only that

> We asked permission to publish it, but were refused. It made no criticisms, but also failed to describe most of the characteristics of the school which are different.[35]

I have already referred (page 332) to the ILEA inspection in 1982 and summarised their comments on learning at the school. Their report also commended the commitment of the staff and the involvement of parents and pupils. They were impressed with the good relationships within the community, the sense of warmth and family, and the value given to individual viewpoints.

This apart, there is very little material other than subjective impressions on which to base any assessment. Such subjective impressions, of people who have been involved with the school, are all the more difficult to interpret since WL has evoked an intense emotional response from most people who have been connected with it. The dominant response has been one of loyalty to the ideals and people of the school. Workers, and some children, frequently found themselves in circumstances which required them to paint the school in a glowing light and defend it against objections: speaking at conferences and meetings, writing articles, talking to visitors, appearing on broadcasts, lobbying politicians, approaching charitable foundations. Defensiveness became a habit and it became difficult to stand back and attempt a detached appraisal of what was really being achieved.

However, around 1985 a distinctive change took place within the school. Long-standing workers had left to be replaced by new workers who started to express overt criticisms of the school's principles and practices. This led to an extended and often bitter debate involving workers, former workers, parents and ILEA officers. The central issues of this debate were (a) whether or not the school was successful in achieving its aims, (b) whether or not (a) *was* the central issue, and (c) whether or not the *Principles of Operation* needed to be changed in the light of experience.

Amongst WL people, opinions range from those who consider that the experiment has been largely successful to those who believe it has been largely unsuccessful. It would be a major undertaking to collect, analyse and evaluate these opinions. One possible approach would be to interview as many of the former children, parents and workers as could be traced. It would perhaps be of particular interest to have some picture of the opinions of former children as to the value of their time at the school. One test of a school, after all, is whether its former pupils judge it to have helped them. I would recommend this as a potentially worthwhile research project, but I cannot speculate on the possible outcomes.

There is general agreement that WL worked well for some of the children who went there. The school was particularly proud of Karen McDaid who left WL in 1985 having been there for 13 years [36]. There was a feeling that she had gained more in terms of personal qualities than she may have foregone in terms of conventional scholastic attainment. Two other success stories are recorded in the published words of a satisifed parent:

> I was thrilled to find such a place that operated in such a positive way. I'd been worried for quite a time about what I was going to do

about my kids' education because I can't stand schooling. I don't think it has anything to do with education. It just seems to constrain children, control them and do a great deal of damage to their desire to learn, and the idea of corporal punishment appals me. The White Lion seemed to be a place that met every requirement I had.

My eldest child, Moraig, started there straight away. She was three then, she loved it. She stayed at the Free School until she was thirteen and then she decided that she wanted to do lots of exams and so she transferred to the local comprehensive, Islington Green. I thought it was really positive for a thirteen year old to make such an important decision for herself. There were some things she missed but White Lion had given her enormous self confidence. During her first term her year-head at Islington Green said to me, 'Gosh she's a real recommendation for the Free School system'. She got seven 'O' levels there and now she's doing three 'A' levels at the sixth form centre.

My son Hamish started at White Lion two years later than Moraig, when he was three. Like Moraig he eventually decided to go to Islington Green to do his 'O' levels. When he first got there his year group had to do a maths test and he camed third out of the whole year, so academic standards at the Free School are obviously pretty good...

I think there's so many good things about White Lion in terms of what it teaches kids about taking control of themselves and their lives, how it tries to teach kids about making decisions and taking responsibility.[37]

Opinions vary as to whether such 'success stories' constitute a minority or a majority of youngsters who have attended WL. It is to be hoped that eventually a research project will be mounted to explore this, and to attempt to discover the factors making for success or lack of it. In the cases quoted above, common features were lengthy stays at the school, and the close and active involvement of the parents in the school. (Both Karen's mother and Moraig and Hamish's mother had done spells as paid workers at the school).

One possible explanation for the disparity of opinions about the success or otherwise of individual children is a lack of agreement about the criteria upon which a judgement might be based. For the parent just quoted academic criteria - resulting eventually in examination passes - were clearly significant. It is doubtful whether

many other parents or children - or workers - shared this aspiration. In WL's history no youngster attending the school has ever passed an O-level (and, as far as is known, the two mentioned above are the only WL children to have gone on to attain O-level passes elsewhere). A handful have attained lower-grade CSEs in one or two subjects. But to my knowledge there has never been any complaint about this from any parent or pupil. Parents and children who aspired to examination passes either did not go to WL, or else transferred to other schools at the secondary age or earlier. For most parents the commonly expressed aspirations were that their child should acquire the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, be happy at school, keep out of trouble, and get a job on leaving. Workers tended, by contrast, to share the progressive tradition's emphasis on personal qualities - things like confidence, sincerity, independence, tolerance and the ability to form satisying relationships [38].

What children expected of the school is more difficult to gauge (and perhaps the impenetrability of children's expectations accounts for why they are so often discounted). One young man said to me, after he had left, "I wish I'd never gone to the free school. I would've learned much more if I'd gone to an ordinary school." But in fact he'd come to WL because he had been refusing to attend his ordinary school. A young woman commented recently "I wish I'd done my lessons at the free school and passed my O-levels" although she had steadfastly refused to attend more than the occasional 'lesson' at WL. Both these people were expressing their aspirations as they now perceived them as adults, but clearly these were different from what they wanted - or were able - to do when they were children.

A different category of 'success stories' would include those who joined WL in a state of emotional distress and who succeeded in sorting out their problems with the help of the school. There were some unquestionable instances of this, but again only a properly mounted research could confirm whether such successes were the exception or the rule, and examine what factors made for success.

Yet another category of success would take in those youngsters who came to WL labelled as 'truants' but who then achieved good attendance records. In respect of the older children, WL has in effect served as a 'truancy centre'. This was not, however, how the school wished to be regarded:

> We would emphasise that we do not regard ourselves as a special school or unit, or only suitable for particular kinds of children.[39]

While some free schools (such as Freightliners and the North Kensington Community School) set out with the limited objective of keeping a small group of youngsters out of trouble and offering them a modicum of elementary instruction, WL had more major ambitions. It aimed to pioneer a new way of education suitable for all children, serving as a model which, it was hoped, would be widely imitated.

Acknowledging this, it is still possible to say that by the criteria of truancy centres, WL has been successful. Of the 69 children who joined WL at the age of 11 or over, 62 had had poor attendance records at their previous schools. Of these 62, all but 15 had tolerable attendance records at WL and many of them produced good attendance records (although it should be said that WL was a good deal more flexible than other schools: a child would be marked present on the register if she or he put in an appearance by 10.30 or 11 am.)

Moreover, of these young people, who come into recognised high risk categories in an area of high youth crime, hardly any got into serious trouble with the law whilst at WL (although several may have been lucky). No youngster on the roll of WL has ever received a custodial sentence from the courts. Compared with truancy centres and special units in Inner London, this is a commendable record. WL's work with these 'high risk' youngsters was acknowledged by the ILEA and by the Social Services Department of Islington Borough. In recognition of it the latter granted the school substantial funding in the years prior to 1982. People from all over the country who were involved in setting up truancy centres and special units visited WL to study its ideas and methods.

In the last few pages I have suggested four criteria for judging the WL experiment: child satisfaction, parent satisfaction, 'clearing up' emotional problems, and attendance records. Obviously many more criteria could be suggested. Any research which attempted to evaluate WL would have to face the question of by what criteria the school is to be judged. Now it may be the case that different sections of the school community would value different criteria. The possibility exists that these are not reconcilable; in other words, that different groups within the school had incompatible objectives. If this were the case, it would point to a fundamental dysfunction which might go towards explaining some of the problems I have described in the last two chapters.

POINTERS TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE

Some of those who have been involved in WL would consider that I have unfairly dwelt on the problems WL has faced and given insufficient

attention to the positive sides of WL life. (The same sort of charge might be levelled against the whole radical critique of schooling - see Appendix A, page 461 - which gave rise to free schools). But even a critical study of WL should acknowledge the joyful side:

> And then, the very next day, the kids will bust their guts studying, reading, writing, thinking, making things, playing. The kids meeting will be a miracle of self-awareness, thoughtfulness and democracy. Dinner will be a treat, the dining room rocking with laughter and joy. And then everyone will disappear - off on outings, to classes at the local college, to sports, or up to the art room, or making cakes in the kitchen. And suddenly it is four o'clock and we could go on for hours. On days like this we know the free school is right.[40]

No adequate picture of WL could ignore the many happy and fulfilling hours and, to mention only a few examples, the excellent work done in the art room in the first years of the school or in the music room in the early 1980s, the unquestionable success of the nursery, and the enormous number of happy outings and residential trips to all parts of Britain and abroad (*Bulletin* 5 reported that it was possible for free school children to go on over 150 outings in one year.)

It may redress the balance somewhat if I conclude this chapter by drawing attention to certain positive features of WL (though not without the occasional quibble). My suggestion is that these are results of the free school experiment which point towards a successful radical practice.

Relationships

When the ILEA inspectors reported on the good relationships within the WL school community they were pointing to what many people consider to have been the school's greatest strength. In his study *The Divided*

School Peter Woods says:

> A major theme of this book is that the institutional structure of the school does impose constraints and conditions on relationships, which effectively remove them from the personal sphere. [41]

WL went a long way towards breaking free of these institutional constraints and putting relationships back into the 'personal sphere'. Many relationships between workers and children, and workers and parents were open, honest and trusting: there was what George Dennison calls 'reality of encounter' or what the existentialists call 'authenticity' in relationships [42].

Workers' perceptions of how successful WL was in this respect vary, possibly in relation to how satisfactory they felt their own relationships within the school were. At WL there was, first of all, a great deal of physical contact between adults and children: cuddling, holding hands, stroking and so forth. Photographs of meetings show 11-year-old boys sitting on adults knees - unthinkable in a conventional school. Just how far the physical intimacy of WL was removed from orthodoxy is illustrated by this advice given by the legal department of the NUT in 1972:

> ... the wise teacher will refrain from unnecessary physical contact with his pupils. To put an arm around a boy or girl, however innocently, or however genuine the underlying emotion which prompts the action, is technically an offence.[43]

I hasten to add that WL has never been touched by any hint of 'sex scandal' which has been, in the past, a common springboard for attacks on progressive ventures in education [44].

The belief that a teacher must necessarily maintain a professional distance from the pupils - summed up in aphorisms like 'familiarity breeds contempt' - provides a rationale for the formality which

characterises many conventional schools, as this advice by a well-known headmaster indicates:

> The old saying 'Never Smile Before Easter' was an exaggeration that nevertheless had a germ of good psychological sense in it.[45]

The experience of WL did not bear out this orthodoxy. Although there were exceptions, WL found that it was the children with whom workers had the closest, most open relationships who got most out of the school. They, in the main, were the ones who took a responsible part in the democratic process, who made constructive use of the school's freedoms, who took advantage of learning opportunities.

Not every adult, however, found it easy to develop intimate relationships with children without abdicating their adult status. The proponents of 'reality of encounter' and 'authenticity' are all agreed that it is *inauthentic* of adults to abdicate their 'natural authority', perhaps by trying too hard to be 'one of the lads'. There was a great deal of debate about this question in the first years of WL, and disagreement about it resulted in three workers leaving.

The Allocation System

WL early on developed a system whereby each child had an 'allocated worker' who was responsible for watching over that child's progress, taking care of his/her welfare, and for visiting the parents at home once a week. In my time at the school is was up to children to choose which worker they wanted to be allocated to. This allocation system was at the core of the relationships built up between workers, parents and children. The triangular *personal* (as opposed to institutional) relationship - worker, child, parent - is, we might posit, one of the

things lacking from those schools where teachers advise each other not to smile before Easter.

There is general agreement that the allocation system has worked well at WL, as well as being a source of real pleasure for workers who got to know a number of families very well. It was not uncommon, for example, to be invited by parents to meals or parties in their homes. But whilst the relationship with parents was a source of strength for the school, it was sometimes soured by the fact that allocated workers had to carry bad news:

> The problem is that so often the visits are provoked by the children's lack of interest in school activities, or by some complaint. As a teacher there are some front doors I hate to knock on, just because of the "Oh God, what is it now?" expression as the door is opened.[46]

WL did indeed place a heavy burden on parents, expecting them to take up problems which had arisen in school, whether of omission ('Chuck hasn't done any reading') or commission ('Vera's been bullying again'). Some parents tired of the school bringing its problems to them, as they saw it:

> I think that when the children at the free school do not do as they are told, sometimes seeing the parents is not enough. The parents say: "Well if you can't do nothing with them, I can't." [47]

Some parents felt that the readiness of the school to turn to them when problems arose was 'passing the buck' - a view shared by some workers. It is arguable that the school sometimes looked to parents to exercise a disciplinary function which the workers, given their libertarian principles, were unwilling to exercise themselves.

Having said this, it should be stressed that the concept of 'authenticity', or 'reality of encounter', does not mean that relationships must be utterly harmonious. On the contrary, it is the

repression of feelings involved in keeping up a pretence of harmony which were seen by some radicals as one of the worst features of ordinary schools [48]. Conflict and anger are part of any human relationship and, many theorists argue, a necessary part of good relationships [49]. It will be worth quoting a quite long passage from Carl Rogers to make this view clear:

> Early in this chapter I reported Miss Shiel's feelings about the "mess" created by the art work. Essentially she said, "I find it maddening to live with the mess! I'm neat and orderly and it is driving me to distraction." But suppose her feelings had come out somewhat differently, in the disguised way which is much more common in classrooms at all levels. She might have said, "You are the messiest children I've ever seen! You don't care about tidiness or cleanliness. You are just terrible!" This is most definitely *not* an example of genuineness or realness, in the sense in which I am using these terms. There is a profound distinction between the two statements which I should like to spell out.
>
> In the second statement she is telling nothing of herself, sharing none of her feelings. Doubtless the children will *sense* that she is angry, but because children are perceptively shrewd they may be uncertain as to whether she is angry at them, or has just come from an argument with the principal. It has none of the honesty of the first statement in which she tells of her *own* upsetness, of her *own* feeling of being driven to distraction.
>
> Another aspect of the second statement is that it is all made up of judgements or evaluations, and like most judgements, they are all arguable. Are these children messy, or are they simply excited and involved in what they are doing? Are they *all* messy, or are some as disturbed by the chaos as she?...
>
> ... I have found from experience that to stress the value of being real, of *being* one's feelings, is taken by some as a license to pass judgements on others, to project on others all the feelings which one should be "owning". Nothing could be further from my meaning." [50]

It is hard to say whether conflict and anger at WL was expressed in quite the way recommended by Rogers; but at least it was expressed.

Caring and Belonging

The quality of caring at WL was high. This was no doubt helped by the school's small size and favourable worker/child ratio. In conventional

schools a class teacher or form tutor must care for upwards of 20 pupils, and a teacher responsible for pastoral care may well have 150 children to look after. The WL allocation system gave each worker no more than seven or eight children to care for, and for several years workers were allotted two afternoons a week for this work. In addition, each individual child was discussed by the workers together at least once a month, in some cases much more often. In this way children could be helped in a way that is simply not possible in large schools. It is a matter of regret that no evidence has been collected on which to base an evaluation of the effects of this caring.

WL engendered a powerful sense of belonging within its community and evoked a fierce loyalty from most of the people who have been connected with it. Even youngsters who spent much of their day intimidating other children and vandalising the building would stoutly defend the school against its critics and turn out on visitors' evenings to provide glowing accounts of free school life [51]. This apparent paradox suggests that WL was only partially successful in channelling the goodwill it created into the achievement of purposes for which the school was founded. One of these purposes was to prove the value of freedom in education. Almost all the children were keen to assert verbally that the freedom was of value to them; but their reluctance to actually use that freedom in ways construed by the workers to be worthwhile suggests a rather more complex story. Even so, many people would agree that the experience of loyalty and belonging is in itself worthwhile for children in the context of contemporary inner-city life.

Flexibility

WL achieved a flexibility which most conventional schools do not. Firstly, the absence of a rigid division of labour meant that there

were no 'restrictive practices'. If a fuse blew, you just went to repair it. If a room needed re-decorating, you got a few children together and decorated it.

Secondly, there were no fixed periods, bells, or rigid timetables. The structure within which learning was to take place had few administrative constraints on it. There were no fixed 'playtimes', nor rigidly fixed starting times or ending times. Activities could flow from one room (say the art room) to another (such as the science room). There was no institutional need to divide 'work' from 'play' and the possibility existed for the school to bring the two closer together.

Thirdly, there were few standing arrangements which could not be altered at short notice if everyone agreed. If a group studying natural history needed a specimen, they could get into the minibus and go and look for it. Fourthly, the school's policies were constantly open to scrutiny, and changes in policy could be, and often were, made quickly and with a minimum of institutional fuss.

Another aspect of WL's flexibility was its open-ness. This was a feature of most free schools and I described it briefly in chapter 4 (page 186-187). The unconventional opening hours deserve special mention. In its early years the school was open in the evenings, at weekends, and through normal school holidays. Children learn all the time and it was considered that the resources of the school should be available to them as much of the time as possible. By 1976 this had proved to be too much of a burden on the workers. The school began to close at weekends and during holidays, though playschemes, open to all local children, were organised during the Easter and summer holidays. The school continued to open in the evenings and was funded for this

under the auspices of the Young Lions Youth Club. But Islington's funding for this was withdrawn in 1980 and in the following years the evening activities were gradually phased out.

Although these 'extra' hours had not been made use of by all the children, other children from the neighbourhood were welcomed outside their own school hours, and so WL was a resource for a relatively large body of young people. In 1980 for example 80 youngsters were using WL in out-of-school hours (not, thankfully, all at once), less than half of these being on the roll of WL school. Some adults from the neighbourhood also made use of the school's facilities.

There was general agreement that the policy of 'open all hours' and of welcoming local people into the school was, in principle, a good one. It is a matter of regret that WL was not able to continue this early practice. The preparedness of workers to put in very long hours and the funding to employ extra workers were the crucial factors here.

Parents

WL was of course not the first school to think of education *with* the parents (as opposed to *despite* the parents or even *against* the parents [52]) but it was still, at that time, uncommon. Many parents themselves got a good deal out of WL. This was particularly true of those who were able to become actively involved in the daily life of the school. There are many who speak fondly of the time their children attended the free school, and some of these associate certain beneficial changes in their own lives - increased self-confidence, new interests, a new awareness for example - with that time. WL did make a contribution towards adult

education without much in the way of deliberate organisation towards that end.

Workers and Working Collectively

Most workers consider that their time at WL was a happy and fulfilling one - for all the aggravation and hard work. Of course the primary purpose of a school cannot be the edification of its staff, but if the staff are edified, that is an added bonus. Few workers would deny that they learned a good deal about 'life' at WL. And on a practical level, workers had to develop a wide range of skills - cooking, fund-raising, administration, book-keeping, building maintenance, public speaking, problem solving, counselling, working with various arms of local government, amongst many other things - which were to stand them in good stead elsewhere. As one ex-worker remarked "White Lion gave *me* a damn good education."

Whilst the school had problems in involving parents and children in formal decision making, there has been general satisfaction with the way that collective decision-making amongst the workers has functioned. Given the unevenness of parent and child involvement, the *de facto* responsibility has rested with the workers, and this was exercised chiefly at the weekly evening meetings. In effect the evening meeting performed the role of the headteacher in a conventional school. It was an important recognition of this that in 1982 the ILEA agreed that the meeting was collectively responsible for the school, despite the scruples of certain of its officers who would have preferred to know which single named person was in charge.

WL's experience lends some support to the claim made by radicals [53] that it is unnecessary to have a single person in charge of a school. Certainly WL's small size worked to its advantage here. With 12 people it is possible for everyone to have a say, and go on discussing each issue until a consensus emerges. But whether this would work with a staff of, say, 80 is an open question. Representative democracy (for example, elected delegates to a school council) would produce new difficulties; for example, it would be difficult to arrive at a consensus without voting if delegates were wondering what the people they represent would be thinking.

Although WL workers were satisfied with the collective decision-making arrangement, I am not sure that this is sufficient to 'prove' that collective decision-making is an effective system. Sceptics might wonder whether any of the school's problems and inefficiencies could be traced to this arrangement. They might ask, for example, whether collective decision-making can lead to 'fudged' policies which owe more to the need to reach a consensus than finding effective solutions to problems. Or they might wonder whether collective decision-making, because it leaves no single individual feeling that they 'carry the can', can lead to a lack of urgency in dealing with problems. They might even suggest that 'collective responsibility' can become 'collective irresponsibility'.

Such questions could only be answered by an intensive study of WL's decision-making. On the question of responsibility, though, it has been observed that there was always a tendency for two or three workers to take a leading role, a fact which most workers recognised although it was sometimes thought of in terms of power:

> The power was an intensely complicated affair and it wasn't shared even amongst the adults very evenly. Exactly what is at the root of

> power in that situation I'm not very sure. Information is certainly one thing: certain adults had far more access to information about what was going on in the school, and what was intended for the school, than others did, and I suppose because of that, and because of their own determination to spend more time on that, they had more power than anyone else.[54]

It may be suggested that these leading individuals also took more responsibility than anyone else. Certainly they worked longer hours. But their leadership was a *personal* leadership rather than an *institutional* one [55]. Even the most influential individual could be challenged and over-ruled at a meeting. Whether this was a good thing must remain a matter for further enquiry.

WL's collective structure put workers in a very different situation from other radicals: it was much harder for them to apportion blame when things went wrong. Radical teachers in conventional schools could always, and often did, attribute problems they encountered to someone else - a reactionary headteacher, inflexible senior staff, other teachers; or, beyond this, to the education authority, or the government, or just 'capitalism' in general. It was much harder to do this at WL. Apart from the constraints I noted in the last chapter, there was nothing to stop WL workers from adopting whatever policies they felt were needed to deal with a problem. Whilst workers relished the freedom of action which WL gave them, it was a sobering experience to realise that, often, they had no-one to blame but themselves. The option of 'permanent oppositionism' which I described in chapter 1 was not open to them. This opened the way for a new kind of radicalism - not a radicalism which moans and groans and grumbles and blames, but a radicalism which looks for positive and feasible solutions to problems.

Another facet of working at WL which needs further assessment is the minimal division of labour. Of course, there was some division of

labour: the teaching specialisms of the workers, for example, and certain specialist tasks such as book-keeping which were rotated on a periodic basis. But workers were faced every day with a bewildering *range* of tasks. Although days were never boring, it was difficult to establish any working rhythm and the long-term effect was enervating. Many jobs could not be done as well as workers would have wished. For these reasons it was from time to time proposed, but never agreed, that the school should have a few specialist posts - a cook, for example, or a secretary. Such an arrangement would have been a retreat from the original ideals. This is another example of the dilemma of choosing between a cherished principle and an effective practice. There are strong arguments on both sides and it is not easy to see how they may be resolved.

Small Size

It is clear that much of WL's successful practice may be attributed, at least in part, to the small size of the school. Good relationships, the allocation system, the caring, flexibility, and collective working are all very much easier with a small number of children and a relatively large number of adults. It might be claimed, then, that the WL experiment has demonstrated the benefits, not of free schooling, but of small schooling. This would appear to lend some weight to the various campaigns which have been mounted in recent years in support of small schools.

Keeping the Radical Flag Flying

From the radical point of view, perhaps WL's most valuable function has been to 'keep the flag flying' through years of pessimism and retreat. Even in 1976 the school reported that

> ... some of us feel a deep depression about the way in which the excitement and energy of radical educational reform, so strong a few years ago, seems to have been dissipated.[56]

Like Summerhill, WL's most important achievement may turn out to have been that it survived. Continuing references to WL in radical periodicals [57] indicate that there is still a body of people who look upon WL as a model for their educational aspirations. It now seems to be common for teacher education courses to offer their students a seminar on 'alternatives in education' and WL is often asked to send speakers to these.

CONCLUSIONS

What WL stands for is a practical and sustained attempt to find a radical way forward. It is an easy thing for radicals to attack conventional schooling, less easy for them to specify what they would put in its place which would be workable. It seems to me right that WL should want to publicise its successes and disseminate its ideas. And it seems right too that the difficulties WL has encountered - some of which it has solved, others not - are also made available for public scrutiny.

Although I would not wish to suggest a close analogy between scientific progress and educational progress, there is one aspect of scientific progress which is relevant to look at here. Behind every scientific advance lies hundreds of hours of failed experimentation - numerous theories which did not work out. Scientific advance takes place because scientists take the risk of failing: and no opprobrium is attached to them when they don't achieve immediate success. Success and failure necessarily go hand in hand - just as they do for a child learning to walk. Educational advance must also take the risk of

failure, but the price of failure is high because the experiments must be done with real people. And the price of *admitting* failure is also high. But progress can only be hindered by a reluctance to admit failure. That is why I do not want the criticisms of WL brought out in the last two chapters to be seen as a dis-service to the ideals which prompted the founding of the school.

It is a matter of regret that the WL experiment has not been methodically monitored.[58] The experiment could have provided a wealth of evidence which might have been valuable to the radical movement, whether by substantiating its theories or pointing to ways in which those theories need to be re-examined. This chapter and the last might have been subtitled 'sketches for a research project' and it will be worth summarising here some of the questions which any future research into the school might address:

(a) A comparison of WL's experience 'within the system' (prior to 1982) with its experience 'outside the system (prior to 1982) to discover just what being 'within the system' involves in practical terms.

(b) A study of WL workers, and their backgrounds. An investigation of the reasons for the turnover of staff. How far does the low pay of workers help parents and children to regard them as equals?

(c) A study of WL meetings, including the hidden dynamics of meetings, and the efficacy of collective decision-making. Why don't parents come to meetings?

(d) The issues of authority, responsibility, power and order - to be considered both at a conceptual level and a practical level.

(e) The 'hidden' socio-cultural constraints which operate upon and within the free school.

(f) What is it about certain children which makes them able to make constructive use of freedom? Did staying on a long time at WL help them

develop this ability, or did they stay on a long time because they already had it?

(g) An investigation of the children's conceptualisation of 'free school'.

(h) Interviews with ex-parents, children and workers to gather some empirical evidence for an assessment of the school.

(i) An investigation of the criteria upon which assessments of the school may be based. How far did different groups - for example, children, parents, workers - agree/disagree about these criteria?

(j) Case studies of children, to include case studies of those who came to the school with emotional problems.

(k) The issue of 'problem' children and how far free schooling is appropriate to their needs.

(l) Admissions policy: a clarification of the various arguments and the collection of empirical evidence which bears on these arguments.

One radical theory which does not seem to have been borne out by the WL experience is that "There is a considerable potential for the assimilation of the free school movement into a program for the streamlining and rationalization of the advanced capitalist order." These are the words of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis. They continue:

> ... the free school movement contains elements thoroughly consistent with the modern corporate capitalist imperative for the "soft" socialization of at least a substantial minority of the workers: whence the strange coalition of corporate and political leaders with free school "radicals". The very rhetoric of educational liberation - genuinely put forth by radicals - can quite easily become the concrete practice of recasting much of the school system into the mold of advanced corporate capitalism. As in the case of its inspirational progenitor, the Progressive Movement, the ideology of educational liberation can become a tool of domination.[59]

It is difficult to see WL as anything like a 'recasting of the school system into the mould of advanced coroprate capitalism', unless we think of that mould requiring a sort of deprived sub-proletariat who

live by their wits in the ghetto but have no ability to transform or abolish the ghetto. Whilst it is true that WL did receive substantial funding from some rather surprising sources [60], there was little sign that 'capitalists' were greatly impressed by what went on at WL.

Unfortunately there wasn't much sign that anyone, outside of radical circles, was greatly impressed by WL. The original intention was to establish a school which would be a model that would have to be emulated. It was a landmark when in 1982 the ILEA agreed to take over the school. But whatever the reasons for ILEA's decision [61], it was not the start of a programme of establishing free schools throughout inner London. Indeed the hopes of the other surviving free school in inner London - Kirkdale - that ILEA would also take them over have been repeatedly dashed. What WL has so far failed to do is produce the kind of evidence that would convince others that it is worth emulating.

I wish to end my study of White Lion Street Free School by putting forward a hypothesis, and to do so I want to bring together four seemingly minor points which have arisen. The first came in chapter 4, where I noted John Hipkin's view that order emerges out of commitment to a joint endeavour. Hipkin's actual words were:

> The firmest point of orientation for a group is its task. A group should know what its task is and be committed to it. Nothing undermines the morale of a group so completely as a sense of its not getting anywhere. Thus the task will need at some point to be explicitly acknowledged. Merely to assume that it has been understood is to risk tipping the balance of the activity very much in favour of purely private goals.[62]

The second was the WL boy who, when asked "Why are we here at the free school?" replied "To not be whipped". The third was my suggestion that at WL there was no *prevailing* 'definition of the situation'. The fourth point can be found by examining WL's *Principles of Operation* .

That document (which was originally, in 1977, entitled 'Aims') begins "The White Lion Street Free School sets out to meet the basic social and educational needs, including the teaching of basic skills, for those living in its catchment area". This is, of course, an aim which any school would have. But it is, in fact, the only *aim* expressed in the document: the remainder is concerned with *means*, and a majority of these are expressed in terms of what the school will *not* be doing.

My hypothesis is a simple deduction from these points: WL lacked an over-riding sense of purpose capable of infecting all within it with a clear sense of joint endeavour. It seems sad that a child who had been at the school a long time should conceive of its purpose only in the negative terms of avoiding a whipping. I do not think he can be blamed for this: I suggest that the messages given out by the school to its children were, at best, confused and merely negative. The children were not 'committed to the task' because they did not know what the task was: and they got no help from the *Principles of Operation.* The paradox is that most of the people who have worked at WL, including its founders, have been people with a strong sense of purpose in their own lives. They were motivated by a vision of a better world and a keen sense of the potential of humanity. My hypothesis is that WL has - so far - failed to engage most of the children in this purpose. In the next chapter I will argue that the root of the problem lies in misconceptions about the nature of motivation. I shall not be forgetting Hipkin's warning about 'purely private goals'.

NOTES

1. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 2*, page 6.

2. Interview with Alison Truefitt 1 October 1986.

3. School of Barbiana *Letter to a Teacher* page 24.

4. A.S. Neill *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* page 54.

5. George Dennison *The Lives of Children* chapters 6-11, *passim.*

6. Maurice Punch *The Guardian* 8 May 1973.

7. This finding came out of a small pilot study I conducted which asked former workers to identify children who had made good use of the free school environment. Of 23 children who were agreed by all my respondents to have done so, 17 (74%) were working class. Given the rough-and-ready nature of the exercise, this is not significantly different from the figure that 83% of WL's children (see page 281) have been working class.

8. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin* 4 page 22.

9. John Holt, *Freedom and Beyond* pages 86 ff, discusses the first reaction of children to a free school.

10. Ray Hemmings *Fifty Years of Freedom* page 183.

11. White Lion Street Free School 'A Free School 'Curriculum'' in Geoff Whitty and Michael Young (eds) *Explorations in the Politics of School Knowledge* page 186.

12. Allen Graubard *Free the Children* page 221/222.

13. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 3*, pages 10-11.

14. *Ibid* page 10.

15. White Lion Street Free School 'A Free School 'Curriculum'', *op cit*, pages 182 and 185.

16. From verbatim notes made by Teri Connolly at meeting with children.

17. See W. David Wills *The Barns Experiment* page 26.

18. Interview with Lesley Taylor March 1987.

19. Willard Waller *The Sociology of Teaching* chapter XVIII.

20. Lucia Backett 'Street School' in David Head (ed) *Free Way to Learning* page 64.

21. Such as R.S. Peters *Ethics and Education* chapter V.

22. Interview with Alison Truefitt 1 October 1986.

23. John Dewey *Education and Experience* page 38.

24. Peter Newell and Alison Truefitt 'Abolishing the Curriculum and Learning Without Exams' in Peter Buckman (ed) *Education Without Schools* page 79.

25. White Lion Street Free School 'A Free School 'Curriculum'', *op cit*, page 181.

26. 'Intelligent' is the word preferred by John Dewey: "Over-emphasis upon activity as an end, instead of upon *intelligent* activity, leads to identification of freedom with immediate execution of impulses and desires." *Op cit*, page 169.

27. White Lion Street Free School 'A Free School 'Curriculum'', *op cit*, page 182.

28. The description I give here of mornings at WL is open to the possible objection that it is purely subjective. I have shown it to several other workers and former workers - some of whom have different interpretations of the WL experience from my own - and they have not contested it. My description is not inconsistent with the account of the school day published in White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 2* page 10, although the latter is couched in terms intended to put a favourable gloss on WL life. Nor, it must be said, is my account inconsistent with a very different kind of description given by Roy Kerridge 'A Day at the White Lion Free School' in *The Salisbury Review* No 6, Winter 1984, pages 35-38 (but note my reply in the following issue).

29. George Dennison *The Lives of Children*; Jonathan Kozol *Free Schools*; Allen Graubard *Free the Children*; Lucia Backett *op cit*; Anne Long 'The New School - Vancouver' in Ronald and Beatrice Gross (eds) *Radical School Reform*; John Holt *Freedom and Beyond* chapter 5.

30. As Douglas Holly has pointed out "Unstructured learning has a way of becoming perfunctory activity, mere performance" (*Beyond Curriculum* page 171). And John Spradbery has noted the conservatism of pupils: "...the coercive power of this institutionalised school knowledge was greater than that of the school itself. Pupils may disrupt the routines of the school organisation, vandalize materials and premises, and even defy their teachers. But Mathematics could not be questioned." Spradbery goes on to note "the reluctance of those who benefit least from any body of knowledge to question it or to accept change which would liberate them from its constraints." (John Spradbery 'Conservative Pupils? Pupil Resistance to a Curriculum Innovation in Mathematics' in Geoff Whitty and Michael Young *op cit* pages 240-241.)

31. See White Lion Street Free School 'A Free School 'Curriculum'', *op cit*, for an account of WL's attempts in its early years to tackle this question.

32. Letter from Peter Newell to A.H.Halsey, 1972.

33. I suspect that this would require a great deal of work for a very uncertain outcome.

34. They were numbered from 2 to 5. Number 1 was a short duplicated information sheet.

35. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 3* page 28.

36. Graham Wade 'Looking Back on 13 Years of Freedom' in *The Guardian* 6 August 1985.

37. 'Personal Experiences of White Lion' in *Lib Ed* Vol 2 No 2, Summer 1986, page 10.

38. An indication of the workers' values can be found in 'Our Aims' in White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 5*, page 29.

39. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 2*, page 4.

40. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 5*, page 3. These words were actually written by me.

41. Peter Woods *The Divided School* page 22.

42. See George Dennison *op cit*; Martin Heidegger *Being and Time*; Carl Rogers (who prefers the term 'congruence') *On Becoming A Person*. The concept of authenticity is not without its problems: see Roger Waterhouse 'A Critique of Authenticity' in *Radical Philosophy* 20, pages 22-26; and Douglas Holly *Beyond Curriculum* pages 65-67.

43. 'Sex Traps in School', *The Teacher* 13 October 1972, page 3. Caning a child was, however, acceptable physical contact.

44. For example on Homer Lane and his Little Commonwealth (see W.D. Wills *Homer Lane: A Biography*); on Prestolee (see Gerard Holmes *The Idiot Teacher*); on Risinghill (see Leila Berg *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School*); and, more recently, on Dartington School. See also Julia Backett *op cit* page 65.

45. Michael Marland *The Craft of the Classroom* page 7.

46. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 4* page 9.

47. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 5* page 24-25.

48. See, for example, Jonathan Kozol *Death at an Early Age* page 44 and pages 94-95.

49. "It is so easy to underestimate the importance of conflict that I would like to stress for a moment that it is both inevitable and desirable - I mean desirable in a developmental sense..." George Dennison *op cit* page 95.

50. Carl Rogers *Freedom to Learn* pages 113-114. I have more than one reason for quoting this long passage. The reader will realise that it could constitute the basis of a critique of the last two chapters. Instead of trying to describe what went on at WL in terms of facts (or what Rogers would call judgements), the chapters could instead have been written in terms of *my feelings* about what happened at WL: "I felt frustrated by many kids meetings", "I was angry about having to clear up after the children" and so forth. I would not want to dismiss such a

critique lightly. All I can say is that this is not the way I have chosen to write my account. Where I would want to add to Rogers' thoughts is in stressing that every event has a subjective element ("I felt angry about the mess") and an objective element (there *was* a mess). If, objectively, there wasn't actually any mess at all, then there needs to be further investigation of the subjective perception (paranoia? hallucination? neurotic obsession with tidiness?). It therefore casts light on the event to try to establish the facts of the case (was there really a mess or not?). That is what I am trying to do in the case of WL.

51. We might note that such allegiances have been observed even in positively dreadful schools: see Michael Croft *Spare the Rod* part 3, chapter 3.

52. A.S. Neill often claimed that he made progress with children *despite* their parents. Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden *Education and the Working Class* showed how schooling can turn children against their parents.

53. For example Rank & File *Democracy in Schools.*

54. Interview with Alison Truefitt 1 October 1986.

55. Willard Waller *op cit* pages 189 ff.

56. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 4*, page 5.

57. For example, Clive Davidson 'Alternative Ways' in *Resurgence* 118, September/October 1986, page 17; and 'White Lion Street Free School' in *Lib Ed* Vol 2 No 2, Summer 1986, pages 9-12.

58. Alison Truefitt, who kindly read drafts of my two chapters about WL, had strong feelings about this paragraph and the previous one. Because she expresses her view much better than I can, her brief comment is included as an appendix to this chapter.

59. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *Schooling in Capitalist America* page 254.

60. Notably the Wates Foundation (associated with the house-building company), but also a donation of £1,000 from Horace Cutler, at that time Conservative leader of the Greater London Council.

61. The decision was, in effect, taken by the Labour group of ILEA members; their chief consideration was White Lion's democratic structure. It is not so certain that they strongly approved of other features of the school.

62. John Hipkin 'Learning in Groups' in Peter Buckman (ed) *Education Without Schools* page 87.

APPENDIX

A Comment by Alison Truefitt

(I am grateful to Alison Truefitt for many valuable comments on the last two chapters. I have tried to take her comments into account (which is not to claim that she endorses all or even anything of what I say), but one comment stands out as querying my whole 'quasi-objective' approach, and it is worth reproducing it here. It should be read in conjunction with the second and third paragraphs of my 'Conclusions' section (pages 354-355).

"You specify here precisely the parallel to which I object. Children are not particles. We may - stupidly it seems in view of misconceptions like yours - have used the description 'experiment'. But I, at least, feel that the kind of 'theories' you play with here (and the 'evidence' which might support them) are - *all* of them - red herrings so far as a real understanding of WL is concerned. I did, when first writing about the project, appeal to various theories myself. If I underwent any change as a result of the actual experience of WL, especially in retrospect, it was to mistrust theories - educational theories - *per se*. Most are based on a pseudo-scientific view of schooling which is simply not *adequate* to the things that go on in schools.

"I wish I could supply clearly the alternative vision which I feel is needed. You have said so litle about responsiveness to the environment, for example; only a brief mention (in terms of conventional theory of course) of WL workers getting to know individual children's needs. But I know I felt, and wrote, and still feel, that WL should aim to be responsive in a much wider sense - to the needs of the immediate community as well as those of the planet. The key to that responsiveness is, perhaps, a kind of awareness about which our culture talks very little. Given a basic moral stance eg personal efficiency within the planet's needs, I could imagine a free school defined by the quality of its collective awareness: changing all the time - from interventionist to anarchist - and guided by intuitions which no amount of 'scientific' study could evaluate.

"I think all the questions and doubts you raise about the school are of fundamental imnportance: but I see the school's role *precisely* as the response to those questions on a day to day basis. You can't make rules by collecting numbers. You can only stick in there and keep asking the most clearsighted questions you can and then try to answer them, all together, as clearsightedly as you can, *now*. Yesterday's statistics can't solve your problem with Vera and the washing up now. No rules will tell you. No theory. If our intuition was in better shape, we wouldn't find unprecedented decisions so frightening."

CHAPTER 8

LEARNING

The purpose of this chapter is to explore, at a theoretical level, the question of learning. I will be criticising a number of radical ideas, and trying to show what might be done to put radical thinking on to a sounder basis. At the end of the chapter I will be suggesting a framework around which a radical theory of learning might be constructed.

'Learning' is sometimes taken to mean 'erudition', as in 'Dr. Bronowski was a man of great learning'. This is not the sense in which I am using the word. I am using it to refer to, simply, the acquisition of knowledge and abilities. And these need not be narrowly defined (as they are by some school curricula) as propositional knowledge, cognitive abilities and practical skills; there is also the whole domain of emotional learning and the development of awareness and sensibilities, as Edward Blishen hints

> This is a school! A place where people learn to live together and love one another, where people learn to reason, learn to understand... [1]

I take it as axiomatic that learning should be at the heart of the purpose of any school [2]. Although this may seem obvious, there is a view that learning is not as important as 'being'. In Pestalozzi's words

> The reading, writing and arithmetic are not, after all, what they most need; it is all well and good for them to learn something, but the really important thing is for them to *be* something... [3]

Without getting sidetracked into ontology, we can just observe that to oppose 'learning' to 'being' is unhelpful: one can learn and be at the same time. Either 'being' is innate, in which case there is nothing

we can do about it and there is no point in having schools to encourage it; or else it is acquired, in which case it *does* have something to do with learning, as the 1972 UNESCO Report *Learning to Be* acknowledged in its title. What *kind* of beings we are, what we make of our existence, is crucially determined by our learning from the moment of conception onwards.

There is another unhelpful opposition which is often found in radical writing. George Dennison wrote:

> The proper concern of a primary school is not education in a narrow sense, and still less preparation for later life, but the present lives of children.[4]

But one can, of course, be preparing for something *and* have a present life: they are not mutually exclusive. What we need, perhaps, to guard against is the extreme of allowing preparation for some anticipated future to diminish our present lives - an indefinite postponement of the enjoyment of life of the kind portrayed in Harry Chapin's sad song *Dreams Go By*.

Some sections of the radical movement were not interested in the question of learning. For 'quantitists' for example (see pages 233 ff) learning was not problematic: their emphasis was on teaching. An unfortunate by-product of the splitting of the study of education into separate disciplines [5] was that learning came to be regarded as the province of psychologists [6]; with certain exceptions, radicals in the 1960s and 1970s were not greatly interested in psychology. But, as we shall see in this chapter, there is much to be said about learning which is not strictly psychology.

A.S.Neill declared "I have no interest in how children learn" [7]. But when he made statements like:

> Parents are slow in realising how unimportant the learning side of schooling is. Children, like adults, learn what they want to learn. [8]

or

> The notion that unless a child is learning something he is wasting his time is nothing less than a curse. [9]

it seems that he is taking for granted the narrow definition of learning which he associated with traditional schooling - what Neill would call 'book learning'. He took his cue from the 'New Education' which R.H.Quick described in 1910 as "education which aims not at learning, but at developing through self-activity." [10] Here again we have an unnecessary opposition, between 'learning' and 'developing'. Neill was against the systematic organisation of learning (this was at the centre of his disagreement with Maria Montessori [11]) which he considered an unwarranted interference in the life of the child. However, if we accept the broad definition of learning, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the whole point of Summerhill was to create a particular type of environment in which children would learn, not bookish things, but 'the art of living' as Neill saw it.

EPISTEMOLOGY

As a way of examining radical ideas about learning, I want to discuss a statement made by White Lion Street Free School; it is representative of a lot of radical thought on this matter:

> For us learning is defined as the development of the capacity for choice and control. It is an expansion of the learner's own scope for action. It is not something which can be taken out of the hands of the learner, but can only take place when the learner is taking the initiative himself. Defined in this way learning is not compatible with a situation in which the choice of subject matter and teaching method is made by the teacher. [12]

Implicit in this statement is an epistemology which can be traced back to Kant who argued that:

> ... knowledge is not a collection of gifts received by our senses and stored in the mind as if it were a museum, but ... it is very largely the result of our own mental activity; ... we must most actively engage ourselves in searching, comparing, unifying, generalising, if we wish to attain knowledge. [13]

This idea was taken a step further - and given a prominent place on the radical agenda - by Raymond Williams who, in his discussion of creativity in *The Long Revolution* cites this sentence: "The brain of each one of us does literally create his or her own world" [14]. (This sentence would be improved by the omission of the word 'literally', but we'll let that pass). And this line of thought was taken up by many radical writers who challenged what they termed the 'commodity model' of knowledge - a model which 'reifies' knowledge, giving it an 'out there' existence independent of knowing persons. George Dennison put it like this:

> There is no such thing as knowledge per se, knowledge in a vacuum, but rather all knowledge is possessed and must be expressed by individuals.[15]

Another radical writer expressed it as follows:

> Now it comes about that whatever we tell the learner, he will make something that is all his own out of it, and it will be different from what we held so dear and attempted to 'transmit'. He will build it into this own scheme of things, and relate it uniquely to what he already uniquely holds as experience. Thus he builds a world all his own, and what is really important is what he makes of what we tell him, not what we intended.[16]

The project of 'de-reifying' knowledge captured the imagination of radical theorists, including, amongst others, the 'new sociologists', Paulo Freire and Carl Rogers [17]. At the risk of covering old ground (and because one critic of the radicals asks "So what? What difference does it make?" [18]) it is worth spelling out why this was such an exciting idea for radicals. The argument was that the central features of orthodox schooling - pupils sitting quietly whilst the teacher 'teaches'; fixed syllabi and curricula; the authority of the teacher; traditional teaching methods; separate subjects; examinations and tests; marking, grading and streaming; predetermined outcomes; and so

on - all depended upon a commodity model of knowledge. This old model (and its associated psychology, often attributed to John Locke and his *tabula rasa*) seemed to radicals to be the lynch-pin which held the whole despised apparatus together. If "teachers acted as if their students were meaning makers, almost everything about the schooling process would change".[19] Once we see knowing as an act of creation; as a process rather than a product [20]; and once we see education as something with an essentially *unpredeterminable* outcome [21], then the aims, methods and structures of traditional schooling are thrown into question. Any casting of the learner in the role of a passive recipient of knowledge becomes a nonsense.

We might observe that similar ideas to these had been raised by progressive educators before. It was Froebel who had said that "the purpose of education is to bring more and more out of man rather than put more and more into him."[22]. Remember, too, Jean Paiget's famous dictum 'the child must be the agent of his own learning', and John Dewey's definition of education:

> That reconstruction or reorganisation of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experience.[23]

But radicals added two further insights which were new. One was the proposition that knowledge can not be thought of as ideologically 'neutral'[24]. The other pointed to the *alienation* of young people from the knowledge which was offered to them in schools. In a striking passage, George Dennison observed

> Jose could not believe that anything contained in books, or mentioned in classrooms, belonged by rights to himself, or even belonged to the world at large, as trees and lamposts belong quite simply to the world we live in. He believed, on the contrary, that things dealt with in school belonged somehow to school, or were administered by some far-reaching bureaucratic arm. There had been no indication that he could share in them, but rather that he would be measured against them and found wanting. [25]

The radical project, then, was

> ...to re-establish the status of learning itself as a part of the person rather than an alienated activity which goes on, frequently against the will of the learner... [26]

which brings us back to the White Lion proposition quoted on page 368 above. I wish to raise two questions about what we have been discussing. One concerns the epistemology, the other the matter of initiative.

The radical epistemology we have been looking at was characterised as 'relativism' or 'subjectivism': its critics based their case on appeals to 'objective truth' and 'objective reality' [27]. The debate was thus posed as one between 'relativism' and 'objectivism'. But I do not think we have to believe in 'objective truth' to accept that what each one of us 'knows' can not be simply a matter of individual choice. At the very least, it has to have some sort of correspondence with what other people 'know'. (This is sometimes called 'inter-subjective agreement'). What makes human society and human communication is a set of *shared* understandings and *generally accepted* meanings. This is most obviously embodied in language. If I go to the greengrocer and ask for a pound of potatoes, it just won't do for the greengrocer to 'know' that what I want is those long yellow things which grow on trees in tropical climates. Communication depends upon a high degree of (but not an absolute) correspondence of meanings between individuals. So, if it is true that 'the brain of each one of us creates his or her own world', it is clear that in a social world this must happen within more-or-less definite parameters. Indeed, we call people 'mad' who 'live in a world' which seems to have no connection with the 'world' that most of us live in.

Education is surely concerned with such *shared* meanings. It seems obvious that the 'expansion of the learner's scope for action', to use White Lion's phrase, is largely dependent on developing an understanding of the *shared* world which makes up human society. One's scope for action, and one's capacity for choice and control, will be increased as one's knowledge increases [28], but only if one's knowledge is true - if, for example, it accords with the facts. Knowledge, or rather belief, which does not accord with the facts does *not* increase our scope for action: a person who 'knows' that you draw unemployment benefit from the RSPCA is in for disillusionment. For all the philosophers' doubts about facts - doubts about certainty, doubts about reality, doubts about objectivity - our daily lives necessarily proceed on the basis of a common-sense understanding of facts - commonly agreed facts - and I do not see how it could be otherwise.

Nor do I feel entirely happy about the radical project of 'de-reifying' knowledge. If something goes wrong with my car, I may not have any idea of how to rectify it. But it is sometimes possible to turn to the manufacturer's manual where I can find the knowledge I need to remedy the fault. It seems as if the knowledge does exist, in latent form, in the manual. It is true that the manual itself is useless until a human being comes along and, after reading it, makes the knowledge his own - that is, understands it. However, with the advent of computers and robots, it begins to look as if this human role could become redundant. Of course computers have to be programmed by humans, but philosophers of mind are currently tackling difficult questions of whether computers can create 'new' knowledge - whether, in fact, computers can 'know'.

A radical writer who suggested a way out of these difficulties was Paulo Freire. He wrote

> One cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomized. The separation of objectivity from subjectivity, the denial of the latter when analysing reality or acting upon it, is objectivism. On the other hand, the denial of objectivity in analysis or action, resulting in a subjectivism which leads to solipsistic positions, denies action itself by denying objective reality. Neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism is propounded here, but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship.[29]

If this is correct, a radical theory of learning needs a theory of knowledge which avoids two extremes: one, knowledge seen as a 'thing' which must somehow be pumped into passive learners; the other, knowledge seen as a purely individual creation. I shrink from offering any last word on this subject, suggesting only that it is an area which radicals need to give more thought to.

INITIATIVE

I turn now to the third sentence of the White Lion statement: "Learning is not something which can be taken out of the hands of the learner, but can only take place when the learner is taking the initative himself." The truth of this was questioned by a Conservative opponent of free schooling who remarked that during his national service he had been made to learn many things he didn't want to know - the initiative was entirely out of his hands. The possible response that such learning would not have developed his capacity for choice and control seems to me to be difficult to substantiate. However uninterested he may have been at the time to learn, say, how to use a rifle, it is arguable that his enforced learning would enable him to make the choice later in life, if he wished, to use a rifle - a choice

which someone who had not learned how to use a rifle would not be able to exercise.

In point of fact, the experiments of behaviourists have shown that learning can take place when the learner is taking no initiative. Indeed, we have a colloquial expression - 'learning the hard way' - to describe things we learn without taking any initiative to learn them. (Thus 'Vera learned the hard way that dogs can bite'). And in case anyone should think that only reactionary authoritarians would advocate such learning, I draw attention to the passage of A.S.Neill quoted on page 216, especially the last sentence.

There is a weak sense in which all learning requires the initiative of the learner, in that the learner's mental faculties do have to be minimally engaged. I sometimes have the radio on, but am only half listening to it; and I sometimes learn things this way. Yet I am not 'taking the initiative' in any meaningful sense in this situation. Dr. Johnson's opinion that "what is learnt without inclination is soon forgotten" [30] may sometimes be true. But sometimes it is not: when I learned from the background radio that John Lennon had been shot in New York, I didn't soon forget it.

It may be possible to defend the White Lion statement by drawing a distinction between the accidental learning of discrete bits of information (dogs bite, John Lennon is dead) which can be learned without taking any initiative, and much more complex learning tasks (such as learning French, or how to play the piano) which may require much greater efforts on the part of the learner. But I suggest that the only truth we can wring out of the White Lion sentence as it stands is

the unremarkable one that children may not learn very much in boring lessons.

The White Lion statement goes on "defined in this way, learning is not compatible with a situation in which choice of subject matter and teaching method is made by the teacher." If we remove the qualification 'defined in this way', the proposition is clearly false. If it were true, no-one would ever learn anything in traditional classrooms. But there are many people who will vouch that they *did* learn something in such classrooms. Even if we do not remove the qualification, it is far from clear that the WL proposition is true.

Another distinction which may be useful here is that between 'training' and 'education'. Training has a specific content and a specifiable outcome, and a person may be trained (like our Conservative national serviceman) without taking any initative. But whether one can be 'educated' without taking the initiative is a more difficult question. I shall leave it 'on the table'; my concern in this chapter is with learning, not with the broader question of education.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Enshrined in libertarian educational thought is a sentiment which might be summed up in the motto 'learning good, teaching bad'. I am not sure where this sentiment originated. Rousseau gave Emile's teacher a central role. Godwin criticised teachers but did not seek to diminish their place. Cobbett, however, had this to say about the schoolmaster in his day:

> He is their [the pupils] overlooker; he is a spy upon them; his authority is maintained by his absolute power of punishment; the parents commit them to that power; to be taught is to be held in

> restraint; and as the sparks fly upwards, the teaching and restraint will not be divided in the estimation of the boy. [31]

Libertarians, as Michael Smith has pointed out, are always uncomfortable when talking about teaching [32]. This was well illustrated by the decision in 1972 to change the name of the magazine *Libertarian Teacher* to *Libertarian Education*. A.S.Neill was notoriously - in fact, comically - uninterested in whether his staff could teach or not. For libertarians in the 1960s and 1970s the slogan was 'put learning back into the hands of the learner' which I take to be the kernel of the White Lion statement we are discussing. At its sharpest this sentiment turned into bitter attacks on teachers in general.

This libertarian stance, as Douglas Holly has noted [33], compounds two separate issues: one, how children learn, and two, the power relationships between teachers and pupils in conventional schools. Teachers in conventional schools justify their authority over children by claiming that they use it to get children to learn. Libertarians, rejecting this authority, seem sometimes to leave the teacher with no part in leading children's learning. Let us explore this idea.

Libertarians, like the deschoolers, placed great emphasis on 'incidental learning', meaning all those things one learns for oneself in the course of daily life. The ideal model is portrayed in William Morris's *News From Nowhere*: a utopian society where all economic difficulties have been eliminated and everyone lives together in love and friendship. The children pick up what they want and need to know without any formal schooling. The adults all have plenty of time to help children, who also learn from each other and from doing things in the real world.

Now it is obviously the case that one can learn things without a teacher. Infancy offers particularly striking examples, and John Holt has shown, from his observation of children's sports, how they learn without any teaching [34]. But two errors can arise from this recognition of incidental learning. One is to make an opposition (as libertarians do rather too often) between incidental learning and *organised* learning, as if one had to do one or the other but couldn't do both. The other error is to deduce that teachers are superfluous.

I would maintain that there are many things which one can't learn without a teacher; that there are many things one is unlikely to learn without a teacher; and that there are many things which are much more easily learned with a teacher than without. For example, it is inconceivable that any one person could discover for themselves the knowledge and skills of acupuncture which have been developed by the Chinese over many centuries. You might, perhaps, with enormous dedication, learn them solely from books, although you would need ample opportunity for trial and error practice - an opportunity which few patients would want to grant to a 'self-taught' acupunturist. But books (including the mis-named 'Teach Yourself' books) don't do away with a teacher. They merely put the teacher, who writes the books, into a different relationship with the learner, in the same way as other forms of distance learning like Open University courses.

As several critics of deschooling argued [35] it is wholly improbable that 'incidental learning' could equip most people with the knowledge and abilities which are required if a complex society like ours is to be sustained. Some radicals were so disenchanted with our complex society that they saw no case for sustaining it. The contradiction was that this view did not prevent them from "stooping to pick up the

golden apples dropped from the tree of industry": if one accepts things like reliable supplies of food, telephones, electric power, record players, air travel and all the rest then *de facto* one is accepting the need to sustain a complex society.

Here, once again, we need to get away from a false opposition: "remember, it is learning, and not teaching, that we are interested in" [36]. I suggest that we should be interested in teaching *and* learning. What radicals need to find is the proper role for the teacher, which will be somewhere between no role at all (as in some free schools) and the domineering role which radicals regarded as an oppressive feature of traditional classrooms. This question of the proper place of the teacher was explored by several radical writers [37] and has been the subject of some sensitive investigations by researchers over the past decade [38]. White Lion's statement that 'learning is not compatible with a situation in which the choice of subject matter and teaching method is made by the teacher' is, (as well not being true), too sweeping a statement to be helpful. The relationships between teacher and learner, between learner and content, and between teacher, learner and their context will surely be subtle ones which cannot be reduced to simplistic formulae.

INFANT LEARNING

Radical ideas about learning drew heavily on the model of infant learning. Infant learning demonstrates the enormous capacity for learning with which almost every human is endowed, and a curiosity which seems so remarkable that it seems right to call it 'natural'. The acquisition of language is a particularly marvellous achievement. Moreover, the infant displays an amazing degree of motivation, both

instinctive and conscious. Infants set themselves learning tasks and learn a great deal from experimenting on their own. All this "and not a professional teacher in sight" remark Colin and Mog Ball [39].

Clearly if learning of this intensity and quality could be sustained throughout childhood and into adulthood, many of the problems of schooling - such as the problem of 'underachievement' - might disappear. Some radicals held that it was only schools and teachers which prevented this [40]. Often quoted was John Holt's assertion that "if we taught children to speak, they'd never learn" [41]. (The same assertion had been made 50 years earlier by Edmond Holmes [42].) It is possible to slide from here into a belief that if we did away with schools and teachers and just left children to themselves, all would be well. But there are four reasons for doubting this.

Firstly, there is the matter of developmental stages. It may be a mistake to presume that the infant stage *could* be sustained indefinitely. Piaget has pointed to a series of developmental stages, although his theory has been challenged [43]. Secondly, to say that children learn to talk - or walk - without teaching is to define 'teaching' in highly restricted terms. In learning to talk and walk there is much interaction between helpful older people and the learning infant. The 'wild boy of Aveyron', who encountered no other humans, did not learn to walk; perhaps it never occurred to him to try [44]. There are many recorded cases of children brought up in silent homes who, of course, don't learn to talk. (There are, however, some cases which suggest that siblings in such an environment can develop a private language. But the inadequacy of such a private language for any purpose other than communicating with each other goes to demonstrate the point made on page 371/2 above, that there needs to be a shared or generally

accepted element in knowledge and abilities learned). Rather than accept the bland assertion that no-one teaches children to talk, perhaps we should ask whether the part which older people evidently do play in helping children learn to talk might not be taken as a paradigm of good teaching. Perhaps Margaret Mead got it right when she said:

> When a child is learning to talk, the miracle of learning is so pressing and conspicuous that the achievement of the teachers is put into the shade. [45]

Thirdly, the question of content is surely crucial. Infant learning is all well and good as long as the infant is choosing his or her content (but to be careful about this we should note that this content can only be chosen from what is presented to the infant by his or her environment: English children, normally, learn to speak *English*; infants can't learn to fly). But, as I shall argue shortly, there is an increasingly *social* content in what *needs* to be learned. It is simply impossible for infants, once past the first few days of life, to go on learning only those things which take their fancy at any moment. They have, for example, to learn to start taking solid foods, and there are many parents who will testify that this is not quite as serene a process as the idealised model of infant learning would have us believe.

Which takes us, fourthly, to the matter of motivation. While it is reasonably clear that most infants want to, and need to, learn to get about and communicate and much else, it is less clear that these same organic needs and wants lead everyone to learn other things - to share toys with other children, say, or to read and write. There comes a point at which the purely egotistical drives of the infant become insufficient for learning to live in human society. Learning takes on a social dimension. And this takes us on to the central concern of this chapter.

MOTIVATION

If A.S.Neill was not interested in how children learn, one of his great admirers, John Holt, *was* extremely interested and published two remarkable books on the subject in the mid-1960s - *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn.* Based on close observation of children, these books are full of perceptive insights which earned the books a place on many College of Education reading lists notwithstanding Holt's radical conclusions. But I would take issue with Holt on a number of points, and we can begin by considering the following statement:

> In our struggle to make sense out of life, the things we most need to learn are the things we most want to learn. Curiosity is hardly ever idle ... When we learn in this way we learn both rapidly and permanently ... Birds fly, fish swim, men think and learn. Therefore we do not need to 'motivate' children into learning, by wheedling, bribing or bullying. [46]

Part of what Holt says had been said 160 years before by William Godwin:

> Liberty is the school of understanding. This is not enough adverted to. Every boy learns more in his hours of play, than in his hours of labour. In school he lays in the materials of his thinking: but in his sport he actually thinks: he whets his faculties, and he opens his eyes. The child from the moment of his birth is an experimental philosopher.[47]

But Godwin was much more circumspect in his choice of words than the 1960s radicals. In *Freedom and Beyond* Holt returns to the question of motivation with a characteristically vehement statement: "Talk about motivation or innovative courses or inspiring kids to learn is simply dishonest nonsense."[48]

One need not favour bullying or bribing (I'm not sure about wheedling: defined as 'persuading by coaxing words' it may have its merits: what, after all, is poetry?) to discern positive virtues in motivation. Let us consider the example of children learning to swim [49]. Some children, when first taken to the swimming pool, recoil in

terror. But adults can use various means (including, no doubt, wheedling) to show them that, despite first appearances, swimming can be fun. This teaching role has long been recognised: "gifted educators are precisely those who can get children going on activities which have no initial appeal to them"[50]. It would be a happy thing if every child took readily to water as soon as they saw it. But they don't. Whilst Holt sweepingly rules out 'motivation', Godwin was more temperate:

> The best motive to learn, is perception of the value of the thing learned. The worst motive ... may well be affirmed to be constraint and fear. There is a motive between these, less pure than the first, but not so displeasing as the second, which is desire, not springing from the instrinsic excellence of the object, but from the accidental attractions which the teacher may have annexed to it... [51]

Holt returns to the question of swimming in a later book, still arguing against any adult persuasion:

> The child might in time have learned to swim on his own, and not only had the pleasure of swimming, but the far more important pleasure of having found that pleasure for himself. Or he might have used that time to find some other skills and pleasures, just as good.[52]

I know several adults who can't swim and who are afraid of water and who regret not having been helped over this hurdle in childhood. They would disagree with Holt's position. But then Holt makes a further point. If swimming were an isolated instance, he might accept the worth of 'motivating' a child to swim. But it isn't an isolated instance. This kind of thing is happening all the time because

> there are dozens of adults, each convinced that he has something of vital importance to "give" the child that he would never get for himself, all saying to the child "I know better than you what is good for you".[53]

It is this cumulative effect which, Holt argues, deprives children of a sense of being in charge of their own lives and is so harmful. The same point was made by Neill: "The brilliant teacher diminishes the child's autonomy by the *continuous* exercise of the powers of persuasion."[54]

The strength of such radical arguments is that they reject the view that motivation is a quality (perhaps genetically determined) *which some children have and others don't*, like big feet or red hair [55]. In this view "if students are not interested in learning what the teacher insists they learn they are said to 'lack motivation'"[56].

But in responding to this view by insisting that *all* children have an intrinsic motivation, these radicals implicitly accept the definition of the problem as an matter of individual characteristics. Holt holds that all children have got motivation, and for him that's the end of the matter. But that isn't the end of the matter. Where Holt goes wrong - and he has this in common with conservative educationists - is that by focussing exclusively on the individual learner [57], he overlooks the fact that motivation has a crucial *social* dimension. What an individual is motivated (or not motivated) to do is critically influenced by his social (as well as his natural) environment. Just as an animal born into the hot desert does not need to seek ways of keeping warm, so a child born into a society where no-one swims will have little, if any, motivation to learn to swim. And, more importantly for schooling, a child born into a society where there is no written culture will, of course, grow up without literacy, blissfully unaware of the joys and sorrows of reading.

Children may be intrinsically motivated to walk and talk, but they start learning to walk and talk only because they see and hear other people doing it. Similarly, it is superficial to claim (as some have [58]) that 'left to their own devices' children will learn to read and write. As I argued in chapter 4, children are never 'left to their own devices'. They grow up into a human society [59]. In some sections of human society, reading and writing is a commonplace activity, and it

has frequently been observed that children from these sections rarely have difficulty learning to read and write. (If they do, it may be diagnosed as an illness, and given a name like 'dyslexia'). There is a whole continuum of environments in which reading and writing is less and less common-place, through to non-literate societies. Although we may accept that all children have ample innate ability for the task, in this continuum children will have less and less *social* motivation to acquire literacy, and in the non-literate societies no motivation at all. This is the reasoning behind Michael Duane's comment that

> The solution to the literacy problem lies not in better techniques for teaching reading... but in social changes that will have the effect of making reading as essential to the normal lives of all people as it is, at the present time, for the middle classes.[60]

The operation of social motivation is clearly visible in the periodic 'crazes' which sweep our nation's youth - hula-hoops, yo-yos, clackers, skateboards, Rubik cubes and so forth. Suddenly 'everybody's doing it' and everybody *wants* to do it. But these examples should not lead us to think that social motivation is a trivial or ephemeral thing. My contention is that it is the most powerful single determinant of what children learn and what they don't: educationists ignore it at their peril.

Before leaving this section, let us look briefly at another of Holt's sentences quoted above: 'the things we most need to learn are the things we most want to learn'. This statement is open to all sorts of doubts. 'Wants' and 'needs' are slippery concepts. If we swap the words 'need' and 'want' around in Holt's sentence, it becomes no more (or less) self-evident, which suggests that his statement is, at best, a tautology. It is easy to think of cases where people need to learn something but don't. That's why we say 'she doesn't learn, does she?'

when we see someone making the same painful error over and over again. What I suppose Holt means is that people will learn whatever they need to learn, so we don't have to worry about making any arrangements for them to learn. This was Neill's view. It is not believable. The other day a friend of mine saw a five-year-old girl walk into the road to be killed by a bus. She needed to learn not to go into the road, but she hadn't learnt it.

NECESSITY AND MOTIVATION

The proverb 'necessity is the mother of invention' reminds us that necessity is a powerful source of extrinsic motivation. (I am using the phrase 'extrinsic motivation' to make a distinction from the purely internal drives which Holt suggests are all that are needed to sustain learning). It is easy to see how necessity works by thinking of primitive societies [61]. It is from primitive societies that text-books on learning often draw their examples [62]. Children must learn how to build boats, control fire, build huts, gather food and so forth if the society is to survive. Whether they want (in the sense of 'feeling like it') to learn these things is neither here nor there, although we might speculate that since these things are so commonplace - like walking and talking - it is unlikely that they would not want to: they are so much part of the warp and woof of daily life, and children learn them by being involved in *doing them*.[63]

But in complex contemporary societies the necessities of survival are much more difficult to appreciate, being in large measure removed from daily experience [64]. For example, it is not part of the everyday experience of city children that food has to be produced by people

working the land. Importantly, survival comes to be perceived as an individual problem (where will I get my food from?) rather than the shared collective problem familiar to primitive societies (how will we produce the food we need?). Thus an important collective social motivation to learn has been dangerously undermined.

I am not saying, of course, that complex societies do not have mechanisms to ensure that the necessities of life are produced. But these mechanisms are obscured from children's experience, and therefore they will only learn about them if specific steps are taken to bring them to children's attention. Unfortunately, the mechanisms are all too easily presented as a bewildering array of 'jobs' (the farm worker; the builder etc), and the children's relationship to the mechanisms as a matter of 'getting a good job' - a matter of purely individual ambition. The social aspect of 'getting a job' - that we all have to acquire skills needed for our collective survival - may be perceived by youngsters as mere moralisation, if it is perceived at all. In times of mass unemployment even the *individual* motivation to 'get a job' is weakened.

Free schools, and similar radical programmes, which encourage children to pursue their own interests (in the sense of things they find interesting) do nothing to overcome this problem. Indeed, they may reinforce the problem by encouraging children to conceive of their future place in society *only* in the individual terms of 'self-realisation'. Rejecting even the 'mere moralisation' of persuading children that they should get a useful job, they make no contribution to the fundamental task of preparing the next generation to do what needs to be done to ensure their survival.

Putting children face-to-face with necessity has, however, been a feature of some educational experiments. A notable example was the Forest School which existed from 1930 to 1940 [65]. The Woodcraft movement [66] is another example which continues today. The founder of Forest School, Cuthbert Rutter, put his aims this way:

> Every child should have some effective play with fields, rivers, woods. It will cause a lot of trouble but it is worthwhile to fix things so that every child can experience weather conditions to be guarded against with cunning, hunger that can be satisfied with enterprise. In asking for these things we are pushing back first-hand experience to some slight contact with natural surroundings, a universal historical and pre-historical educator but momentarily obscured and slighted by premature city life. [67]

Just how far youngsters may be detached from the need to play a part in the collective human struggle to survive is suggested in one of Paul Goodman's most moving passages. He recollects asking some young people what they wanted to work at, if they had the chance, after they left school:

> ... all of them had this one thing to say: "Nothing". They didn't believe that what to work at was the kind of thing one *wanted*. They rather expected that two or three of them would work for the electric company in town, but they couldn't care less. I turned away from the conversation abruptly because of the uncontrollable burning tears in my eyes and constriction in my chest. Not feeling sorry for them but tears of frank dismay for the waste of our humanity... [68]

For the other side of the coin of not comprehending how our society ensures our daily survival is that children may not themselves feel necessary. George Dennison compares the peasant children at Tolstoy's school at Yasnaya Polyana with his children at the New York First Street School:

> Where the peasant children acquired the skills of farming and carpentry and dozens of other necessary occupations, and therefore knew that they were indeed necessary persons, ours had acquired nothing and could do nothing, and did not at all feel necessary to the inner life of labour that sustains a country. [69]

In order to become a member of any community, the growing child has to learn - and make his/her own - the ways of that community. This process, sometimes called socialisation or acculturisation, is a fact of human life. There is a tendency amongst radicals to consider it as an oppressive imposition upon the child - a matter of 'conditioning' if not 'brainwashing'. Neill and Holt, for example, see socialisation as a matter of interfering adults imposing their whims on the growing child. But such an 'imposition', if we must call it that, is an inevitable part of growing up into any human society. Socialisation need not be viewed as something done to the child: it may be viewed as a process in which the child learns to find a viable *modus vivendi* of some sort within society - something everyone has to do. Take the example of language acquisition. There are, in fact, laws of language and the growing child has to accept them. This is not a matter of 'brainwashing'. Here is a concrete example:

> There are always hundreds of things that are not true, but we are forbidden by the laws of communication from expressing them, unless someone believes otherwise: we cannot go around saying, however truthfully, 'You don't have three heads', or 'the ceiling isn't purple', or 'that dress you're wearing isn't mine'. Instead we have to wait until someone either declares the reverse or acts as if the reverse is true. From a surprisingly early age, children are sensitive to that unwritten law and seem to understand the conditions under which one can and cannot produce a negative statement.[70]

John Holt tells the story [71] of an eleven-year-old who, asked if she believed in God, replied "yes, I suppose so. After all, what choice do we have?" Holt offers this as an example of the adult brainwashing of which he disapproves. But to call this 'brainwashing' is to slide over important and difficult questions of *culture*. Culture is a set of socially constructed ideas, values, beliefs, customs, conventions, behaviours, established practices, and means of communication. In most

societies these include religion. But it is an inadequate view to hold that people are entirely free to pick and choose from all these as they wish. (Holt in fact acknowledges this later in the same book [72]). As Marx remarked in a famous passage:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.[73]

But this is too harsh: actually culture may be viewed as a necessary pre-emption of choices. It saves each individual from the quite impossible task of deciding every little thing for themselves. Without culture, human society would be impossible. Now culture *is* coercive, just as much as the heat of the sun or gravity is coercive. The difference is that it is within human power to change culture, which is where problems begin. In a static society where the culture has been unchanged for generations, and where the fundamentals of culture are unquestioned, education might be a straightforward task [74]. But a society where the culture is under challenge, where conflicting cultures compete, presents profound problems for humanity which cannot be reduced to a facile notion of 'adult coercion'. The coerciveness of culture in fact acts every bit as much upon adults as it does on children.

In any case, the answer to the girl's question 'what choice have we got?' is 'plenty: millions of Americans don't believe in God'. On that ground at least American society is presumably to be commended: Holt's eleven-year-old would have had much less choice, on this matter, if she had been brought up in, say, Iran.

Holt and Neill err because they do not see growing up in society as a dialectical process between the growing child and society. It is

sufficient neither to see growing up as a mechanistic process of imposition on the child, nor as a process in which the child can freely choose whatever he likes. In Freire's words:

> This process of orientation in the world can be understood neither as a purely subjective event, nor as an objective or mechanistic one, but only as an event in which subjectivity and objectivity are united. [75]

The central problem for radicals is that children have to grow up into a society of which radicals, to a greater or lesser extent, disapprove. As Neill put it "the child must from the start be forced to fit himself to our insane society" [76]. There is a conflict between the need to maintain the culture and to change it. In Jules Henry's words

> Another learning problem inherent in the human condition is the fact that we must conserve culture while changing it: that we must always be more sure of surviving than adapting - as we see it.[77]

Growing up involves learning unexceptionable things - walking or talking for example - but also things which radicals find exceptionable - 'ruling class ideology', competetiveness, gender roles, for instance. Thus when a standard text-book describes the necessary learning of each growing child:

> Clearly, since the inherited accumulated wisdom of mankind is manifested not through hereditary biological mechanisms, but instead is embodied in the material of the social environment and in the laws and customs of organised society, each baby is faced with problems of learning or, in other words, of developing adequate behavioural patterns, to ensure satisfactory adjustment to the complexity of social living... He is not born with the ability to make boats, to control fire, or even to use a spoon.[78]

the problem lies in 'the inherited accumulated wisdom of mankind' (like how to make nuclear weapons?), the 'material of the social environment' (like poverty?), the 'laws and customs of organised society' (like the Official Secrets Act?), 'adequate behavioural patterns' (like 'boys don't cry'?), and 'satisfactory adjustment' (like not arguing with an unjust teacher?). The danger of anthropological definitions of education - such as the one just quoted - is that they leave such

concepts unexamined. Culture and society are taken as fixed givens into which the child has to grow willy-nilly. Even a famous progressive educationist, Sir Fred Clarke, found it possible to say

> It is the first business of education to induce such conformity in terms of the culture in which the child will grow up. [79]

This emphasis on conformity was one of the features of R.S.Peters' definition of education as 'initiation' to which radicals objected [80].

Faced with the problem of children having to grow up in a culture of which radicals disapprove, three possible approaches suggest themselves. One is *insulation*. Rousseau, in his imagination, tried to isolate Emile entirely from society, the source (for Rousseau) of all evil. Summerhill and other progressive boarding schools tried to insulate children by bringing them up in an isolated rural community. Rousseau wasn't keen on letting Emile play with other children; Neill, by contrast, had such confidence in the goodness of children that he was sure that they would, left to themselves without adult interference (the source of all evil), work out amongst themselves the best way of living together. Another example of the isolationist approach can be seen in the Education Otherwise movement. The free schools, however, rejected the isolationist approach, partly because rural isolation is beyond the financial resources of most working-class parents, but partly because they sought to draw on the positive aspects of the local community rather than dwelling on the harmful aspects of its culture.

A second approach starts by attempting to distinguish between the acceptable parts of the culture and the unacceptable parts. The difficult question here is who is to decide what is acceptable and what

is not - and on what grounds? There is also a problem of whether we can divide culture into 'parts' in this way [81].

A third approach involves the concept of 'critical re-evaluation' and I propose to discuss it in some detail.

CRITICAL RE-EVALUATION

This approach starts with the recognition that culture is not a static thing, but is constantly in a state of change and conflict - at least in most parts of the contemporary world. A series of radical books published in the early 1970s took this up. The first to appear was American - Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner's *Teaching As A Subversive Activity*. It was followed, in England, by Douglas Holly's *Beyond Curriculum* and Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist's *What School is For*. To this group we might add Chris Searle's *This New Season* and Colin and Mog Ball's *Education for a Change*, although they had rather different approaches. All of these writers agreed that there was much of value in our culture - whether arts, skills, knowledge, concepts, ethics or traditions. All accepted that to grow up in society children have to come to terms with these. All were opposed, however, to any insistence on a simple conformity to the the given culture. All agreed that schools have a role in systematically making the culture available to children. And all rejected the simplistic opposition which posits that either the learner must be in control of the learning process or the teacher must be in control.

What these writers proposed was that schooling should engage the learner in a continuing process of critical re-evaluation of the culture. (Postman and Weingartner, borrowing from Ernest Hemingway,

call this process 'crap detection', but I will stick with the longer term, clumsy as it is.) Critical re-evaluation stresses two things: as regards content, it rejects the notion of a fixed body of knowledge to be transmitted from teacher to learner; and as regards method, it stresses the active and autonomous involvement of the learner [82]. Critical re-evaluation does not only involve helping children to look at the culture with a critical eye, but also encourages them to participate in the action of *changing* it. And it involves an acknowledgement of those aspects of the culture which are commonly discounted by educational institutions - for example, popular culture [83] or the history of working class struggle [84]. And, finally, it involves giving a central place to the child's own experience.

I wish to raise a number of problems of this idea. My purpose in doing so is not to suggest that it is a 'non-starter', but that a good deal more thought is needed if critical re-evaluation can be put forward as a workable programme by radicals.

The first problem is that all the writers who propose it are concerned with children over the age of eleven. But it may well be that by this age the greater part of the 'damage' (in terms of acculturisation into an unacceptable culture) has been done. For much younger children the possibility of critical re-evaluation - which is essentially a rational process - is more doubtful. It may be that very young people do engage in critical re-evaluation of their own, but if they do so they might be labelled as 'naughty' or 'disturbed'. And indeed, critical re-evaluation requires a sophisticated approach: it does not mean that you reject things just because *you* don't like them; it does involve a sensitive and discriminating respect for other people's values; and it should not involve the adoption of behaviours

which bring individuals into unsustainable conflicts with others. These are difficult enough things for teenagers - and adults - to deal with. I am not at all sure they can be within the understanding of a five-year-old.

The second problem is that all the proponents of critical re-evaluation pin their faith (not without heart-searching) on state schools as the right place for the transmission of culture and its critical re-evaluation. Even if it were assumed that all schools are staffed by people dedicated to the radical cause of critical re-evaluation (there are good reasons to believe that they are not), there remains the possibility, often expressed by progressives, that *all* adults are 'tainted'. As a co-founder of Kirkdale School put it:

> We wanted children to produce their own brave new world. We (the older generation) are already flawed. [85]

Free schools appeared to go some way towards meeting these two problems. They often took children from the age of three, they were to be staffed by the 'right' kind of people - critical re-evaluators all - and they tried to minimise the directive role of adults. They hoped to create an environment which embodied the best aspects of our culture, and it would be in this environment that, in the school hours at least, the children would grow up. As we saw in previous chapters, however, this proved to be more difficult to put into practice than free schoolers had envisaged.

But it seems to me that the most serious weakness of the critical re-evaluation scheme is this: why should children want to engage in it? In other words, where is their motivation to come from? We are forced back, then, to the question of why children learn, or refuse to learn [86].

I have argued that acculturisation is the process whereby children learn to make their way in the culture into which they are born. I have pointed to the insufficiency of the view that children are 'naturally motivated' to learn and that therefore there is no problem about learning. Children are motivated to learn to do the things that other people do: we may say that they want to be like other people. Thus, for example, they have 'role models'. If critical re-evaluation was so commonplace in our society that everyone did it, then it might well be that children would willingly participate. But the whole basis of the radical critique is that critical re-evaluation is *not* commonplace, though it ought to be. It seems possible, then, that children will perceive it, not as something 'everyone does', but as something quite eccentric. It may help to consider a specific example.

A well-known attempt at critical re-evaluation was Johnny Speight's television series *Till Death Do Us Part*. Speight claimed that the aim of this series was to hold up Alf Garnett for inspection, so that we could all see how foolish his racist and sexist prejudices were. And indeed the scripts are full of splendid examples of the folly of Alf's prejudices. But over my years as a teacher I found that it was a rare child who saw it this way. What they saw was a racist and sexist white man who was quite normal. What Alf Garnett actually gave them was a recognisable (if comic) role-model who armed them with an ample vocabulary to express their own prejudices. Television unquestionably plays an important part in shaping the perceptions of children as to what *are* the 'normal' ways of our society, but even when programme makers are attempting a critical re-evaluation (which may not be all that often) it is by no means certain that children will look at the programmes with the critical eye which is required.

It may be that there are certain moments in history - moments of major cultural upheaval - when critical re-evaluation becomes commonplace, and children perceive it as such. At such moments children may be swept up by the impetus so as to be engaged, for their own part, in the process. The cultural revolution in China in the 1960s, or Poland in the early 1980s, may be cases in point. So perhaps was Grenada after the 1979 revolution in that Caribbean island [87]. The 1960s in Britain (as elsewhere) was, to a lesser extent, a period of cultural re-evaluation and evidently children, or at least teenagers, were involved in that. However, the younger the child (or perhaps we might say, the more immature the child) the greater the need for an enveloping sense of security and stability. For them cultural turmoil may seem perplexing if not distressing.

Before continuing, it may be helpful to summarise the argument of this chapter so far; there have been so many interesting side-roads that it is easy to forget where the main road was leading. My main concern in this chapter has been to question Holt's analogy between human learning and 'birds flying and fish swimming'. Whilst accepting that humans have an instinctive ability to learn, I have argued that human *motivation* to learn, once past infancy, has a powerful social dimension which is easily overlooked. This social motivation cannot be reduced to a notion of coercive adults or coercive schools forcing children to learn; it is a necessary part of growing up into any human community, and would be so even in an ideal world [88]. The problem for radicals is that the culture which is the source of this motivation is, to a greater or lesser extent, disapproved of. Some radicals therefore proposed that children should be engaged in a process of critical re-evaluation of the culture. But I have now asked the question: where is the motivation for this critical re-evaluation to come from, except in

times of cultural upheaval when critical re-evaluation itself becomes a central feature of the culture?

SCHOOLING AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

An answer to this question was offered by certain radicals who suggested that the motivation would come from the struggle for liberation into which working class children are pitched historically and which is inexorably bound up with *their* cultural heritage. Acculturisation is now seen as the process of learning the ways of working class life and culture, of assimilating class perspectives, and participating in the class struggle. The motivation will come from the drive to 'be like others' in the context of working class traditions and the class struggle, which itself may be viewed as a continuing process of critical re-evaluation. A prominent exponent of this programme in England was Chris Searle who argued that

> ... we must re-establish culture in its organic, democratic sense, linking it to the real world of people who are working and struggling for control over the conditions of their lives. As teachers, it is only by completely committing ourselves to their struggles that we can commit ourselves to a truly educational consciousness. The 'Problem of Education' cannot be isolated merely as a problem of the schools, or of teachers. It is a problem of politics, and the economic domination of one class over another. It has to be solved politically, in the schools as in all of society.[89]

Describing his own attempts to put this into practice in the classroom Searle says:

> ... it was important to look to tradition and history, to find precedents in the past where individuals and masses of East End working people have similarly resisted or organised, or achieved advances which now benefitted the children and their families. And so local history often pushed its way into the present, as a base for contemporary action and syllabus.[90]

It is worth pointing out that this motivation differs sharply from another motivation - the motivation of the 'bright working class child' to get on and out of the working class [91]. The new plan was to

> Teach the working class assuming that they will stay working class but that they will nevertheless be struggling for equality and for greater fulfilment - as a class.[92]

This was also the plan of Scotland Road Free School (see chapter 4) and it was supplied with something of a theoretical framework by Paulo Freire [93], although the connection between Freire's discussion of the education of adult peasants in Brazil and the education of children in Britain is not wholly clear.

The programme put forward by Searle stressed the need for action in the real world as part of the learning process - 'actional education' as Frantz Fanon had called it. It was not something which could go on behind closed classroom doors. In Freire's words

> Critical consciousness is brought about not through an intellectual effort alone, but through praxis - through the authentic union of action and reflection. [94]

Two currents of thinking can be seen to come together here. The first is a view of class, culture and society which owes a good deal to Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams [95]. The second is a much more combative conception of class which was re-inforced by the renewed interest in Marxism in Britain after 1968.

Searle did get some exceptional writing out of his pupils [96] and it did look as though he had succeeded in tapping a fierce motivation to learn which orthodox schoolers had overlooked, or, more likely, fought shy of for political reasons. Searle came in for intense criticisms, not only from the political right, but also from progressives [97]. It was, however, ironic that after Searle was sacked by his school governors for publishing *Stepney Words* he was re-instated by Secretary of State Margaret Thatcher.

Whilst the programme proposed by Searle, Freire and Scotland Road Free School solves, on paper, some of the problems I have been discussing, it does raise new problems, of which I will mention five.

1. Clearly the theory depends upon acceptance of the class conflict model of social change. I do not wish to digress into a debate about Marxism, but the presumption that the working class is the historical agency of social transformation is open to some doubt. If we look at the movement for the liberation of women, which has promoted one of the most significant critical re-evaluations of the post-war era, we find that it is not a working class movement - rather the reverse in fact. The women's movement provides us, by the way, with an excellent model of how the process of critical re-evaluation can be socially motivated. Young people - girls at any rate - have been actively involved in this process. The women's movement has generated an enormous amount of learning (even by men, who were hardly 'taking the initiative' if I can refer back to our earlier discussion). And we may note that a great deal of this learning has taken place outside the formal educational institutions - in women's groups, women's centres, women's campaigns, through feminist magazines and books and so forth.

Although the women's movement certainly lends weight to the thesis that conflict is a great source of learning, it cannot easily be explained within a class-conflict model of social change. Nor is the women's movement an isolated example. The 'green' movement, taking this in its broadest sense - concern for the environment, post-industrial economics, non-militarism, ecology, alternative medicine, alternative nutritional patterns etc. - provides another case in point.

2. The 'working class struggle' programme relies upon what some would see as idealised notions of the working class. These notions are given substance by events like the 1984/1985 miners' strike; and both Searle and Scotland Road Free School seemed to draw on their pupils' real experience of working class community solidarity. But the question remains whether such class solidarity, and such a sense of community, are typical of contemporary capitalist society or whether they are lingering remnants of a past era. My question is not whether communities and solidarity are things of the past, but whether they can any longer be identified with a mass working class engaged in a conscious historical struggle to transform society.

Radicals of the left assume that the causes they hold dear will find their natural constituency in the working class movement. Anti-imperialism is an example. In *Classrooms of Resistance* Searle's pupils deal not only with local community struggles - around dockland re-development, the closure of Poplar hospital, the Metal Box factory dispute - but also the 1973 coup in Chile and the black struggle in Southern Africa. Profoundly important as such struggles are, their relationship with British working class culture is uncertain. (This is not difficult to explain: the indigenous working class have benefitted from centuries of British exploitation of other nations and continue to do so today. The British cup of tea remains cheap and freely available only because of the low wages paid by tea plantations in Asia; but worse, the reliance of many Third World countries on such 'cash crops' prevents them from organising their agricultural economies to meet even the subsistence needs of their populations). If working class culture is to provide the social motivation for learning, that motivation must come from the culture as it is experienced and perceived by working class children, not as it ought to be in the minds of left-wingers. For

many working class children lessons about Chile or Southern Africa may seem no more consonant with their experience than, say, Henry VIII's squabbles with the church. I am not arguing that children should not learn about Chile or Southern Africa: only that it doesn't fit very easily into the theoretical programme we are discussing. It is too easy for left-wingers to hold that children should be *made* to learn about Chile and Southern Africa. If they do so, they revert to the same epistemology, the same theory of learning, the same model of the relationship between teacher and taught as the traditionalist who holds that children should be made to learn about, say, the British constitution or the bible. It is worth reflecting on this comment on the Italian 'Doposcuola' movement of the late 1960s:

> They teach in the 'doposcuola' by replacing the traditional heroes with socialist ones: they try to treat the children like friends and ask them 'what would you like to do? or 'what would you like to talk about?' and always end up talking about fascism, resistance, Vietnam and the Middle East no matter what the children's requests are. They talk on these topics just as the school teachers used to, and although the 'doposcuola' pupils are somewhat noisier than ordinary pupils their participation remains passive. [98]

3. The third problem I wish to raise I will simply pose as a question: what is the relationship between the working class culture of which we have been talking, and the *common culture*? [99]

4. Next, when we think of working class struggles we are usually thinking of struggles against opposing forces (city financiers, Area Health Authorities, employers, imperial powers). But we must ask whether the lifestyle of permanent dissension which characterises left-wing activists is a viable, or even a healthy, perspective into which children might be acculturised. Perhaps we should heed George Dennison's warning:

> Teachers who are radicals should refrain from foisting their attitudes on children, especially their highly rationalised sense of alienation. [100]

My own feeling is that children need to be brought in on the positive, constructive, collective endeavours which sustain human life even in capitalist society.

5. My final doubt is a practical one. There is little evidence that working class *parents* in general want an education for their children which is based upon the premise of working class struggle. I suspect that the parent described in this memory of the socialist Sunday Schools is quite rare nowadays:

> My father was a strong socialist... Dad sent me right away to the Partick Socialist Sunday-school... I was taken down at four years of age to the Sunday-school and that was the happiest time of my life right up until I was fourteen... It was very well organised in Glasgow and all of the socialists - the Labour voters as you would call them nowadays - they were really early socialists who wanted a change of society and their children to learn as much as possible about these things... They wanted their children to learn that socialism was a good way of life and what was good for one was good for all, and so this was the moral attitude they had.[101]

But without the support of parents for the programme, it is hard to see how it can be justified. Possibly a case could be made for separate schools for the children of radicals and socialists, but this is an idea fraught with hazards.

It may be that radicals can find answers to these problems. My suggestion is that they should try to do so, as part of the radical research programme which I will propose in the next chapter.

RELEVANCE

Much of the foregoing discussion might have been presented as a discussion of 'relevance'. This was a major concern of radical critics

of schooling in the 1960s and 1970s. Much has been said about relevance, but I wish to make a few brief points here by way of reinforcing the argument of this chapter.

It was common for critics of schooling to 'prove' its irrelevance by pointing to specific items on the curriculum: Latin, perhaps, or quadratic equations (which Neill had a thing about), or Boyle's Law (R.F.Mackenzie's favourite target). Now it is easily shown that we can't pick out irrelevance by pointing to any specific item of content: what is irrelevant to one person may be relevant to another; and what is irrelevant to me today could become relevant to me tommorrow. I will consider, therefore, two other approaches to the matter suggested by radicals.

John Holt [102] suggested that children shouldn't be asked to learn something until they need to know it. Samuel Butler once said the same thing:

> Never try to learn anything until the not knowing it has come to be a nuisance to you for some time... A boy should never be made to learn anything until it is obvious that he cannot get on without it.[103]

A simple example will show the inadequacy of this approach: the moment that not having learnt to swim becomes a 'nuisance' to you could well be the last moment of your life. Parents rightly instruct their children in a large number of things ('don't run out into the road', 'don't pull the dog's tail') in advance of their being needed. Whilst this most obviously applies to matters of safety, there is also an element of wise preparation for all kinds of contingencies. This was, apparently, a feature of the educational process of traditional societes:

> ...the objective was... to produce an independent, self-confident, and self-reliant personality, buoyed up by an inner conviction of his ability to meet any and all situations...[104]

Of course there has to be some limit to this: no-one can be prepared for all contingencies and some 'preparation for contingencies' arguments are less persuasive than others: few people would be unduly alarmed by the threat that if they don't learn Latin they may one day come across a word whose etymological derivation escapes them. Nevertheless, the blanket injunction never to learn things until they are needed is unsatisfactory. We should beware of reacting against an overemphasis on children's learning as a 'preparation for life' by going to the opposite extreme of denying that learning has any preparatory function. There needs to be some kind of balance.

A second approach to relevance poses it purely as a matter for each individual child to decide. The founders of White Lion Street Free School offered an example of this:

> Real learning, as any pre-school child will demonstrate, is a process in which each individual creates his own unique 'curriculum'. He asks and seeks out answers to the questions raised for him by his own unique experience.[105]

We have already discussed the difficulties of taking infant learning as a paradigm for all learning. But there are three other weaknesses in this approach which we should be aware of.

First, by stressing the individual, this statement, like others I have quoted in this chapter, fails to address the question of the relationship between the individual on the one hand and the social and natural environments on the other. It would be equally incomplete to claim that the curriculum is fixed for every individual by the natural and social environment. What we need to stress is the dialectical relationship between the learner and the environment. For a start, what

is 'there' to be learned is determined by the environment in which a child grows up: a child growing up in an English-speaking family learns to speak *English*, not Chinese (except in unusual circumstances). At the same time, the child does make English his or her *own* language, with all the individual idiosyncracies of speech. To say that the curriculum for each child is 'unique' does contain a grain of truth - learning is the activity of the individual mind - but it misleads if we ignore the social dimension of learning: both the social nature of motivation and the social nature of content. In general, the much used term 'individual learning' can be misleading if it posits the lone individual as the basic unit in the educational process. In the words of Bowles and Gintis:

> Human development is not the simple "unfolding of innate humanity." Human potential is realised only through the confrontation of genetic constitution and social experience. Dogma consists precisely in suppressing one pole of a contradiction. The dogma of repressive education is the dogma of necessity which denies freedom. But we must avoid the alternative dogma of freedom which denies necessity. Indeed freedom and individuality arise only through a confrontation with necessity, and personal powers develop only when pitted against a recalcitrant reality.[106]

It should be clear, then, that the concept of relevance has a social dimension as well as an individual dimension. This is readily appreciated if we return to our image of learning in a primitive society: each individual must learn to perform the tasks necessary for group survival. In such primitive societies it is probably easy for the growing child to see how the social relevance of learning coincides with the individual relevance. The fact that this is not so easily seen in complex contemporary society should not lead radicals to retreat into defining relevance in purely individual terms.

The second weakness of the notion that each individual creates 'his own unique curriculum' was pointed out by Vygotsky in his critique of the early libertarianism of Soviet education after the 1917 revolution

[107]. It is, simply, a recipe for 'no change'. It leads inevitably to a concentration on what the child can do and offers no mechanism for taking her or him on to what she or he cannot yet do. In Vygotsky's words "Instruction was orientated to the child's weakness rather than his strength, thus encouraging him to remain at the pre-school stage of development" [108] If the child "asks and seeks out answers to the questions raised for him by his own unique experience" there is no guarantee that the child will move *beyond* his or her own experience. To put it bluntly, the exclusive emphasis on the 'uniqueness' of individual learning leaves children wallowing in a vortex of their 'own experience': it can too easily resemble, and remain stuck at, the pre-school stage of development.

The third problem with the prescription that each individual should determine their own relevant curriculum was discovered quite quickly at White Lion Street Free School. It doesn't work in practice. Within three years of making the statement above, WL was forced to concede:

> There has been a lot of talk recently about letting children decide for themselves what they want to learn. As anyone who has tried it will know, this is not a straightforward alternative... At White Lion Street we discovered early that though a few children knew what they wanted to do, most didn't, beyond a (usually) guilt-ridden conviction that they ought to do reading, writing and numbers.[109]

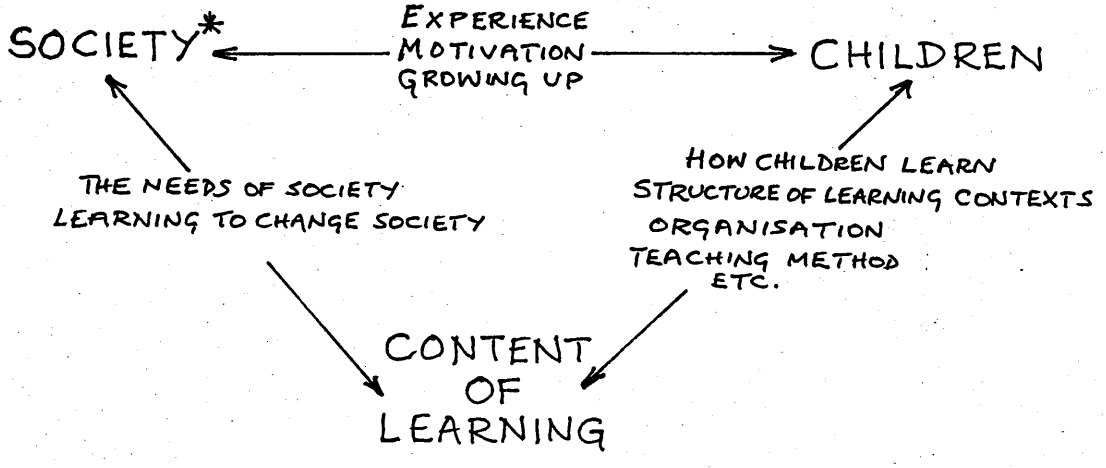
Before leaving the matter of relevance, we should note that there are other arguments against leaving children to learn only what *they* perceive as relevant. John White, for example, makes a case for a compulsory curriculum starting from the principle of liberty [110]. One need not go as far as accepting his plea for a compulsory curriculum to see the strength of his argument that children's capacity for choice and control may be increased by teaching them things which they might not immediately perceive as 'relevant' to them. This cannot, however, be taken as a justification for the conventional school curriculum as

we know it today. Crucial questions of *who* decides what children need to learn, and *why* they make such decisions, are raised. These questions have an ideological dimension which needs to be examined. And further questions of how, why and when children learn things need to be considered. But that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

To conclude this chapter, I want to sketch out a framework which will, I hope, enable us to perceive more clearly the problem of learning. There is nothing new in what I am going to say. It needs saying only because it is so often overlooked in most discussions of schooling.

Let me pose the 'problem of learning' in this way. It is the problem of finding the right relationship between three factors (a) children, (b) the content of learning, and (c) society. Each of these factors is related to the other and may be considered in a triangular relationship as shown in the diagram below. Like all triangular structures you can't



THE PROBLEM OF LEARNING

(*I intend the economy to be subsumed within society. Marxist analyses might prefer to make the economy the third vertex here.)

just change any one of the factors without affecting the others.

This model helps us to see where many theories of learning go wrong. Firstly, let us consider theories which tend to neglect one or other of the three factors.[111]

Neglecting Society

A.S.Neill is a clear case of someone who disregarded society [112]. I hope I have said enough in this chapter to show why this is a serious error. Whilst Neill was very strong on *children* he was quite inscrutable on the matter of *content*: at one time he said he wasn't interested in what children learn, at another he said they have to learn not to gratify themselves at other people's expense etc. In general, concepts of 'child-centred learning' run the risk of giving insufficient attention to society and content. As Douglas Holly puts it

> 'Pupil-centred learning' is as much a dogmatism as 'subjects', 'disciplines', 'academic rigour' and the rest. A humanist-materialist approach is concerned to erect criteria which link the individual and society, the child with the learning.[113]

Neglecting children

Traditionalist educationists - for example, many of the *Black Paper* contributors - tend to consider only the relationship between society and the content of learning. Certain radicals also make this error when they talk of, for example, "the kind of curriculum we need for the building of a critical socialist democracy" [114]. Both leave children out of the equation and, in doing so, "render the act of learning ... a mere accident." [115]

One consequence of this omission is the well-known fact that very many children don't actually learn the content which schools are supposed to teach them. (This doesn't worry everyone: those who despise

the content aren't bothered; and those who favour a stratified society see it as a convenient way of sorting the sheep from the goats).

Neglecting content

It is more difficult to find clear examples of those who talk exculsively in terms of society and children, and who ignore the content of learning. But a definite tendency in this direction can be found in certain free schools and in the writings of the deschoolers who emphasised children's learning in society without giving attention to what the content of this learning might be. The fact that deschoolers advocated no serious arrangements for learning any specific content suggests that they did not regard any specific content as important. The same is true of William Morris's utopia in *News From Nowhere*.

We can now turn to a second set of errors which take the linkages between society, children and content to be only *one-way* linkages. My point is that they must be seen as *two-way* linkages. There may be some overlap here with the first set of errors.

1. Making the linkage 'society' to 'children' only one-way requires children to take society as given and conform to it [116]. It does not see children as contributing to the formation of society. At its extreme, children are simply ignored. A small example is the way that local authorities, until quite recently, built swimming pools which were too deep for young children to stand up in. I have recently seen children wearing badges saying 'children are people too' which sums up their response to this error. R.S.Peters' concept of education as 'initiation' is a good example of a theory which overlooks the fact that children are, from birth, part of society.

The two-way relationship between society and children must be appreciated if a correct understanding of motivation is to be reached; and if we are to recognise that children's experience (often emphasised by radicals) is experience-in-society; and if we are to accept that children have somehow or other to grow up into society - which includes the possibility that they change society in doing so.

Making the linkage 'children' to 'society' only one way is to think in terms of a quite artificial 'world of childhood' in which children may be 'left to themselves.' I dealt with this in chapter 4.

2. The conception of a purely one-way linkage 'content of learning' to 'children' is exemplified by an expression which has become common in recent years (associated, I think, with the rise of the Manpower Services Commission): the 'delivery' of education. This jargon, conjuring up an image of milkmen or postmen delivering milk or letters, rests on the conceptualisation of education as a *thing*. It takes no account of how and why children learn, and why they do not. Children, in this view, are seen as empty jugs waiting to be filled up.

It is not only contemporary technocrats who make this mistake: in 1983 the ILEA published a paper entitled *Delivery of the Authority's Initiative on Multi-Ethnic Education in Schools*; it can be found in the *Black Papers* [117]; and it can be found, too, in radical writings:

> The core of a defence of mixed-ability teaching ... should centre on its ability to deliver an understanding to the great majority of students of the main concepts and principles of the various disciplines.[118]

Conversely, to make the linkage 'children' to 'content' only one-way leads either to the idea that it is sufficient for children to choose their own content, or to the construction of a false opposition between

'being' and 'learning'. This is what happened in certain free schools which were happy to just 'let children be' without concerning themselves with what, if anything, the children learned.

3. Making the linkage 'society' to 'content' only one-way again rests on a static conception of society into which children can only fit in. It excludes the possibility that what children learn may cause them to change society [119]. This possibility lay behind 19th century fears that universal education would lead to revolution. Certain conservative educationists seek to prevent this possibility by insisting on a 'neutral' curriculum, by which they mean a curriculum which does not question the prevailing ideology. Hence, for example, they oppose anti-racist and anti-sexist curriculum developments.

On the other hand, making the linkage 'content' to 'society' only one-way ignores the social (and historical) location of education. It promotes an idealised curriculum ('education for its own sake') which could, if it prevailed, lead to a threat to the collective survival. Education conceived of purely in terms of 'self-realisation' [120] comes into this category. Carried to its logical conclusion (which, however, I do not think it could be) it could produce children quite unable to make their way in society and also quite unable to *change* society.

The relationship between content and society was explored by the sociologists of knowledge in the early 1970s, offering a potentially fruitful means of analysis of this subject.

We have considered the errors which may arise from disregarding one or other of the factors society, children and the content of learning;

and from making the linkages between them only one-way. There is a third set of errors: these occur when educational thoeries regard one or other of the factors as *immutable*.

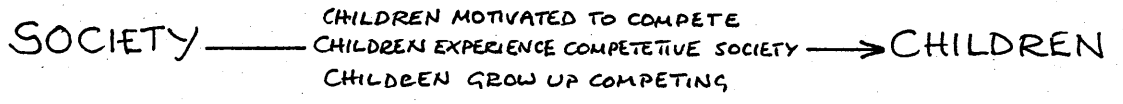
Firstly, we may consider those educational philosophers (such as Paul Hirst) who seek to assert that the content of education may be determined by transcendental considerations which rise above any reference to the particular form of society or the nature of children and how they learn. In this view, the curriculum is just given, and society and children have to put up with it whether they like it or not.

Secondly, there are those - typically conservatives - who tend to regard society as immutable and who require children, and the content of education, to adjust themselves to this fixed 'reality'. In defending Kenneth Baker's 1987 proposals for national testing at the age of seven, for example, Conservatives are often heard saying that society is made up of 'winners' and 'losers' and it is never too early to learn this 'fact of life'.

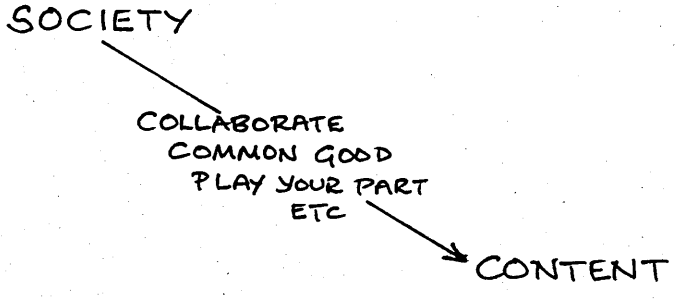
Thirdly, there are those who regard children as immutable: they see children as having a fixed nature and therefore society and content must either accommodate to this nature, or else repress and thwart the developing child with crippling consequences. This is the view found in much libertarian writing on education [121].

It will be seen that any view which takes one of the factors - children, society, content of learning - as fixed places very considerable constraints on the other two. The possibility of dysfunctioning arises, and this is what I shall now consider.

My suggestion is that the problem of learning can only be solved by putting the three factors into a workable relationship with each other. But a situation may arise where, unless something is changed, there is no possibility of any workable relationship. In this situation, dysfunction occurs. It may help to consider a hypothetical example. Let us imagine a society which from an early age imbues its children with a competetive ethos - a society which motivates children, from infancy, to 'get on top', to seek advantage over others, to put themselves first. This may be represented by a particular linkage:



Now let us further imagine that this same society, to be sustained, requires children to learn a particular content: work for the common good, put the 'national interest' first, play the role assigned to you, accept your station in life. This constitutes another given linkage:



When we now turn to the third linkage, between children and content, we can see that there is going to be a dysfunction. What children are motivated to learn does not match up with the content they are required to learn. This is sure to be manifested in problems in schools: teachers struggling vainly to get the children to learn their lessons and so forth.

Such dysfunctioning has been observed by Jules Henry:

> The multiplicity of techniques used by teachers to maintain discipline in American schools is related to the severity of the disciplinary problem; the severity of the disciplinary problem is related to the fact that the children are not interested in being educated; the children are not interested in being educated because of the lack of unity between education and the rest of the social sphere.[122]

Although I have used the term 'dysfunction', other writers have preferred the term 'contradiction', and an analysis of the contradictions of schooling along the same lines as the foregoing can be found in *Schooling in Capitalist America* by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis [123]. Along similar lines this interesting statement was made by the *Big Flame* group in 1977:

> Progressivism [I would say radicalism - NW] put into question what school is for, but it could not bridge the chasm between school and society. For running counter to progressive reform were the material changes in the class structure and labour market we have previously described. The more the internal school experience was made 'relevant', the less relevant that became to changes outside the school gate. It is precisely this weak point which the traditionalists have exploited. For they have a simple answer: functional education.[124]

only I do not agree that 'functional education' is a simple answer, because it does not solve the problem of motivation.

Where there is dysfunction, something has to be changed, unless of course the problems caused by the dysfunction are just left to fester. Different views of the immutability of each factor will give rise to different formulations for a resolution of the dysfunction. Some people might suggest, for example, that children should be thrashed until they learn the content which established society wants them to learn. Others will advocate 'curriculum reform'. And yet others will insist that society must be transformed. This latter was a common radical view and I wish to consider it a little further.

One radical view is that it will only be possible to find a workable accommodation between society, children and content when society is

radically changed. This was the central thesis of Paul Goodman's book *Growing Up Absurd*. Goodman's said that "There is no right education, except growing up into a worthwhile world" [125] and he held that contemporary society does not constitute a worthwhile world and hence the problem of learning cannot be resolved within it. The same idea was expressed in much more specific terms by Ken Coates:

> To see things the right way up, and begin the pursuit of education, we must ask 'what sort of factories do our schools need?' [126]

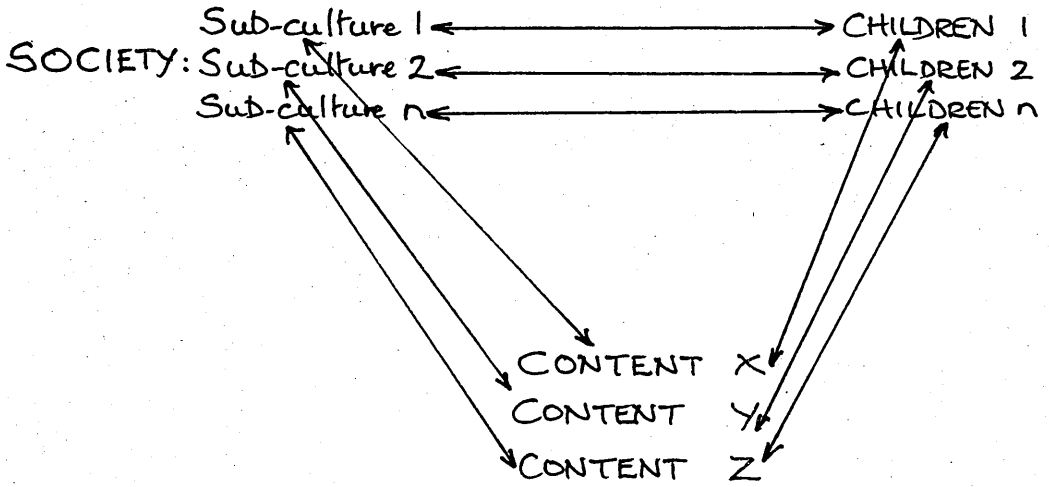
although I would prefer to pose the question as 'what sort of factories do our children need?' since schools are only one possible form of the linkage between children and content.

Now, of course, radicals take as their starting point the belief that society needs changing. Those who don't share this belief will seek other solutions to the problem of learning. But the possibility exists that there may be no such other solutions, and this possibility will increase as (a) children and (b) content, and the linkage between them (how children learn, the structure of learning environments, the organisation of school, pedagogy etc.) are taken as given. For example, the work of Piaget, which suggests that children are not infinitely manipulable but have certain definite characteristics, places constraints on the solution of the problem. Similarly, every bit of content which we wish to hang on to - the 'accumulated wisdom of mankind' as it is sometimes called - constrains possible solutions [127].

The model framework which I have been suggesting has a further important implication for radicals. In blue-printing the kind of society they would like to construct, and the means of getting there, they will have to give the problem of learning - the problem of finding

a workable accomodation between society, children and content - central rather than peripheral attention. Marxists, for example, tend to draw up their blue-prints in economic terms, focussing on the economic and social relations between adults. We can now see that certain economic formulations might prove unworkable, not in economic terms, but because they make dysfunctional demands on children and the content of learning. A study of education in the Soviet Union since 1917, in the light of this hypothesis, might be interesting. However I cannot pursue this question here.

There is hardly any need for me to point to the simplicism of the framework as I have suggested it. As it stands, it does not pay any attention, for example, to the question of class, or of sub-cultures. And again, it does not suggest how changes can be made in, and between, the components in order to move towards the elimination of dysfunction. But in principle I do not see that such considerations could not be accomodated using a more complex framework. For example, the matter of subcultures might be accomodated in this way:



Clearly the analysis now becomes far more complex, but I do not think this is incompatible with the discussion of the preceding pages. For each subculture there is a problem of learning which requires the finding of a workable accommodation between the sub-culture, its children, and the content of learning. There will be a relationship between this sub-culture and the other sub-cultures; between the children of this sub-culture and (a) other subcultures, and (b) children of other sub-cultures; between the contents proposed by the learning of each group of children; and so forth. Proposals for a 'national curriculum' might be seen as an attempt to impose some order on the bewildering complexity of inter-relations which my revised diagram suggests. Likewise, a single system of schooling (comprehensive schooling - but note the continued existence of independent schools for the children of particular sub-cultures such as the wealthy or the progressive-minded) may be seen as an attempt to impose uniformity on the linkage between children and content.

I should stress, also, that I have been concerned in this chapter with the question of learning. But there is much more to schooling than learning (see note [2]); it should not be thought, therefore, that I have offered here a framework for the analysis of schooling: that is an altogether larger enterprise.

CONCLUSION

Although the model I outlined in the previous section does suggest possible directions for further research, my intention in introducing it was primarily to reinforce the argument of the earlier parts of the chapter. That argument may be summarised as being that radical ideas about learning tend to be misleading; they are misleading because they

are incomplete: and they are incomplete because they focus on one particular feature of the learning process and ignore its relationships with the whole. This matters because radicals do make proposals about how schooling should be done (or, in some cases, how it should be abolished) based on these ideas. In some cases they attempt to put these proposals into practice (as in free schools) though more often they propose that others should be putting the ideas into practice. My simple contention is that such radical proposals will not work if they are based on unsound theory.

This chapter was intended as a case study in the sense that it has taken just one topic and looked at what radicals had to say about it. It may well be that each of the other numerous questions raised by the radicals (see Appendix A) could, under similar scrutiny, be shown to need more careful thought. What this would amount to is a radical research programme: and that is one of things I will propose in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Edward Blishen *The School That I'd Like* page 30.
2. Learning is not the only purpose of schools. There is also, for example, a child-minding function. And schools are subject to pressures to fulfil other functions as well, such as social stratification: see Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *Schooling in Capitalist America* Part 2.
3. Johann Pestalozzi *Leonard and Gertrude* page 152.
4. George Dennison *The Lives of Children* page 11. Carl Rogers makes a similar opposition in *Freedom to Learn* page 39.

5.R.S.Peters dates this from the early 1960s - see Paul Hirst (ed) *Educational Theory and its Foundation Disciplines* page 40.

6.This point is made by Douglas Holly in *Society, Schools and Humanity* page 26.

7.Quoted in Jonathan Croall *Neill of Summerhill* page 306.

8.A.S.Neill *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* page 25.

9. *Ibid* page 27.

10.R.H.Quick *Essays on Educational Reformers* page 411.

11.See Ray Hemmings *50 Years of Freedom* page 38-41.

12.White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin 2* page 6. A very similar statement can be found in John Holt *The Underachieving School* page 13.

13.Cited by Karl Popper *The Open Society and Its Enemies* Vol 2 page 214.

14.J.Z.Young *Doubt and Certainty in Science* quoted in Raymond Williams *The Long Revolution* page 32.

15.George Dennison *op cit* page 11.

16.Earl Kelley, quoted in Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner *Teaching As A Subversive Activity* page 94.

17.See Nell Keddie (ed) *Tinker Tailor...*, Geoff Esland 'Teaching and Learning as the Organisation of Knowledge' in Michael F.D.Young (ed) *Knowledge and Control*; Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* page 45; Carl Rogers *op cit* page 272. Rogers attributes the 'new epistemology' to Michael Polanyi *Personal Knowledge*.

18.Robin Barrow *Radical Education* chapter 7.

19.Postman and Weingartner *op cit* page 94.

20.See Jerome Bruner *Towards a Theory of Instruction* page 72; and Paulo Freire *op cit* page 46.

21.See Basil Bernstein 'Education Cannot Compensate for Society' in David Rubinstein and Colin Stoneman (eds) *Education for Democracy* page 116.

22. Cited in R.H.Quick *op cit.*

23. John Dewey *The School and Society* page 89-90.

24. See Kevin Harris *Education and Knowledge.*

25. George Dennison *op cit* page 67.

26. Douglas Holly *op cit* page 60.

27. See Richard Pring 'Knowledge out of Control' in *Education for Teaching* Autumn 1972, and Robin Barrow *op cit* page 168ff.

28. Not only knowing *that* and knowing *how*, but also knowing in the familiar sense. It is interesting that this third 'familiarity' category of knowledge is undervalued by conventional schooling with the exception of the public schools which are well aware of the uses of the 'old boy network'.

29. Paulo Freire *op cit* page 27.

30. Quoted in David Gribble *Considering Children* page 38.

31. Quoted in Richard Johnson 'Really Useful Knowledge' in *Radical Education 7*, page 20.

32. Michael P. Smith *The Libertarians and Education* page 43.

33. Douglas Holly *Beyond Curriculum* page 143-145.

34. John Holt *How Children Learn* page 118.

35. See for example Douglas Holly *Beyond Curriculum* chapter 9.

36. Ajoy S. Ghose 'Fun With Learning: A Supplementary Programme' in David Head (ed) *Free Way to Learning* page 122.

37. Douglas Holly *Beyond Curriculum*; Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist *What School Is For*; Postman and Weingartner *op cit.*

38. For example Michael Armstrong *Closely Observed Children* and Stephen Rowland *The Enquiring Classroom.*

39. Colin and Mog Ball *Education for a Change* page 126.

40. See George Dennison *op cit* page 62; Paul Goodman *Compulsory Miseducation* page 27; John Holt *The Underachieving School* page 23.

41. John Holt *How Children Learn* page 57.

42. Edmond Holmes *What Is and What Might Be* page 216.

43. For example by Valerie Walkerdine 'Developmental Psychology and the Child-Centred Pedagogy: the Insertion of Piaget into Early Education' in Julian Henriques and others *Changing the Subject.*

44. H. Lane *The Wild Boy of Aveyron.*

45. Margaret Mead 'Our Educational Emphases in Primitive Perspective' in *American Journal of Sociology* 48, 1942-3, page 637.

46. John Holt *How Children Learn* page 171-173. Compare this quotation from Charles Hoole *A New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching Schoole* (1660): "... it is Tully's observation of old, and Erasmus his assertion of later years, that it is as natural for a child to learn, as it is for a beast to go, a bird to fly, or a fish to swim..."

47. William Godwin *Fleetwood* page 247-249.

48. John Holt *Freedom and Beyond* page 68. But Holt seems to contradict himself in an earlier book when he says "At a certain age, and particularly with a little encouragement from parents and teachers, they may become very interested in where words come from..." (*The Underachieving School* page 73.) I cannot see any distinction between 'motivation' (in the sense in which Holt is using it) and 'a little encouragement...'.

49. This is an example Holt himself uses in *How Children Learn* page 109 ff.

50. R.S. Peters *Ethics and Education* page 39.

51. William Godwin *The Enquirer* page 78/79.

52. John Holt *What Do I Do Monday?* page 41.

53. *Ibid*, same page.

54. Cited in Ray Hemmings *op cit* page 48. The italics are mine.

55. This is the view found, for example, in D.M. Pinn 'What Kind of Primary School?' in C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson (eds) *Black Paper Two: The Crisis in Education* page 103.

56. Herbert Kohl *The Open Classroom* page 77. See also Jonathan Kozol *Death at an Early Age* page 57 for a discussion of this point.

57. This is no accidental oversight on Holt's part. He belongs to a tradition of thought described by Raymond Williams: "In England from Hobbes to the Utilitarians, a variety of systems share a common starting point: man as a bare human being, 'the individual', is the logical starting point of psychology, ethics and politics... It is rare, in this tradition, to start from the fact that man is born into relationships. The abstraction of the bare human being, as a separate substance, is ordinarily taken for granted. In other systems of thinking, the community would be the axiom, and individual man the derivative." (*The Long Revolution* page 94). English as this tradition may be, it is more clearly visible in the work of American radical writers on education than most of their British counterparts in this period.

58. For example Paul Goodman *Compulsory Miseducation* page 27; Everett Reimer *School Is Dead* page 32.

59. For an opposing view to the one I am arguing here, see Paul Goodman *Growing Up Absurd* page 3-16.

60. Michael Duane in Paul Adams et al *Children's Rights* page 187. It is worth noting here the point made by J. Goody and I. Watt ('The Consequences of Literacy' in *Comparative Studies in History and Society* Vol V No 3, 1962) that "literacy skills form one of the major axes of differentiation in industrial societies." They also argue that since reading and writing are essentially individual activities, a literate culture is characterised by increasing individualisation. See M. F. D. Young 'An Approach to the Study of Curricula as Socially Organised Knowledge' in Michael F. D. Young (ed) *op cit* page 19-46 for a discussion of this. See also Martin Hoyles (ed) *The Politics of Literacy*.

61. See Jules Henry *Essays in Education*

62. For example Edgar Stones *An Introduction to Educational Psychology.*

63. But Jules Henry (*op cit* page 177) claims that no culture in the world, at any time, has assumed a natural impulse to learn. "This does not mean that children are not everywhere naturally investigative, but there is no evidence that children will not lose interest in learning when it requires work."

64. Jules Henry *op cit* page 122 ff.

65. William Van Der Eyken and Barry Turner *Adventures in Education.*

66. The origins of which are described in Leslie Paul *The Republic of Children.*

67. Quoted in Greta Brooks 'The Creed of Cuthbert Rutter' in *Forest School Camps Magazine* No 3, 1968, page 6-8.

68. Paul Goodman *Growing Up Absurd* page 34-35.

69. George Dennison *op cit* page 150.

70. Peter A. de Villiers and Jill G. de Villiers *Early Language* page 61.

71. John Holt *Freedom and Beyond* page 75.

72. See Holt's discussion of 'the discipline of culture' in *ibid* chapter 7.

73. Karl Marx 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works in One Volume page 97.

74. This is argued by David Head in *Free Way to Learning* page 10. But a decidedly less glamorous picture of the static society is offered by Jules Henry in *Culture Against Man* page 234.

75. Paulo Freire *Cultural Action for Freedom* page 21.

76. A.S. Neill *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* page 102.

77. Jules Henry *Culture Against Man* page 234.

78. Edgar Stones *op cit* page 108.

79. Sir Fred Clarke *Freedom in the Educative Society* page 29.

80. For a critique of this concept, see Keith Paton *The Great Brain Robbery* and Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist *op cit.*

81. Douglas Holly discusses this in *Beyond Curriculum* chapter 8. Holly tries to distinguish between the 'common human heritage' (acceptable) and the 'class-related human heritage' (unacceptable) (page 33). Rejecting the libertarian view that it can be left to children to decide, on their own, which are the 'acceptable parts' and which are the 'unacceptable' parts of the culture, Holly eventually falls back on a 'neutrality' argument: "If concepts... are developed systematically... it is possible to have independent structures of learning relatively free from ideological control" (page 139). But in *Society. Schools and Humanity* Holly had been concerned to expose 'neutrality' as an illusion (page 10).

82. See Douglas Holly *Beyond Curriculum* page 21/22.

83. See Graham Vulliamy 'What Counts As School Music?' in Geoff Whitty and Michael Young (eds) *Explorations in the Politics of School Knowledge* chapter 2.

84. See Ken Worpole 'The School and the Community' in Douglas Holly (ed) *Education or Domination.*

85. Interview with Susie Powlesland 30 August 1986.

86. Holly maintains(*Society, Schools and Humanity* page 29) that this is a question about human consciousness which *ipso facto* cannot be answered by behaviourist psychology or positivist sociology.

87. See Students of Bishop's College *Stories from Carriacou.*

88. For an example of how this works in a contemporary utopian fantasy see Marge Piercy *Woman on the Edge of Time.*

89. Chris Searle *This New Season* page 8/9.

90. Chris Searle *Classrooms of Resistance* page 11.

91. Such 'escape-ism', espoused by the *Black Papers*, has been fiercely opposed by radicals for over 200 years. Consider Pestalozzi's fable of

the fish and the pike (cited in R.H.Quick *op cit* page 292-293): "The fishes in a pond brought an accusation against the pike who were making great ravages among them. The judge, an old pike, said that their complaint was well founded, and that the defendants, to make amends, should allow two ordinary fish every year to become pike." R.H.Tawney (*Equality* page 108/9) uses the same idea in his fable of the tadpoles and the frogs. For further discussion of this question see Richard Hoggart *Uses of Literacy* page 102 and Ken Jones *Beyond Progressive Education* pages 52 and 167.

92.Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist *op cit* page 77.

93.Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Cultural Action for Freedom.*

94.Paulo Freire *Cultural Action for Freedom* page 78.

95.Richard Hoggart *op cit* and Raymond Williams *op cit.*

96.*Stepney Words* 1 and 2, Chris Searle *Classrooms of Resistance.*

97.For example Geoffrey Summerfield 'Brainwashed Replicators' in *Times Educational Supplement* 31.10.75, page 23

98.Gastone Tassinari 'The Scuola and Quartiere Movement: A Case Study' in Ian Lister (ed) *Deschooling* page 120. See also Paulo Freire's warning on this matter in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* page 59.

99.For a discussion of this question, see Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist *op cit.*

100.George Dennison *op cit* page 232.

101.Annie Davidson cited in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies *Unpopular Education* page 39.

102.John Holt *How Children Learn* page 104.

103.Samuel Butler *Notebooks* quoted in Jonathan Croall *Neill of Summerhill* page 391.

104.G.A.Pettitt *Primitive Education in North America* page 89.

105. Peter Newell and Alison Truefitt 'Abolishing the Curriculum and Learning Without Exams' in Peter Buckman (ed) *Education Without Schools*, page 78. Note the prescriptive definition. Carl Rogers makes a similar statement: "...the student learns by making independent choices of goals and means, making these choices in terms of what will be valuable to him, and taking the initiative in implementing these choices" (*Freedom to Learn* page 52).

106. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *Schooling in Capitalist America* page 272.

107. I have taken the information in this paragraph from Douglas Holly *Beyond Curriculum* page 115 ff.

108. L.S. Vygotsky *Thought and Language* page 104.

109. White Lion Street Free School 'A Free School 'Curriculum'' in Geoff Whitty and Michael Young (eds) *Explorations in the Politics of School Knowledge* page 181/182.

110. John White *Towards a Compulsory Curriculum.*

111. A similar argument to the one presented here can be found in Willard Waller *The Sociology of Teaching* page 448.

112. See Ray Hemmings *Fifty Years of Freedom* page 173.

113. Douglas Holly *Beyond Curriculum* page 137.

114. Editorial in *Socialist Teacher* 23.

115. George Dennison *op cit* page 198.

116. As, for example, Sir Fred Clarke quoted on page 391.

117. See Jacques Barzun 'To Give an Education' in C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson (eds) *The Fight For Education: A Black Paper* page 29.

118. Ken Jones *Beyond Progressive Education* page 160/161.

119. Consider Douglas Barnes's concept of 'action knowledge' in *From Communication to Curriculum.* See also the quote from *Teaching London Kids* on page 96 above.

120. A feature of some American free schools - see Allen Graubard *Free the Children.*

121. See the introduction in Paul Goodman *Growing Up Absurd.*

122. Jules Henry *Essays on Education* page 168.

123. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *op cit* pages 235-241.

124. Big Flame *The Crisis in Education* page 11.

125. Paul Goodman *Compulsory Miseducation* page 55.

126. Ken Coates in Peter Buckman *op cit* page 29. The same point is made by Bowles and Gintis when they say "If schools are to assume a more humane form, so too must jobs". (*Op cit* page 252).

127. This may be likened to an equation with three variables, x, y and z. The more possible solutions for x we rule out, the fewer possible solutions there will be for y and z.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS

To introduce my concluding remarks it may be helpful to recall the content of the early chapters of this study. In chapter 1 I placed the radical movement in education in the context of the broader radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, and traced its historical antecedents. I attempted to define 'radical' in a number of ways, noting ten contributory currents and nine characteristics of the radicals. I offered some comments on the kind of people who were radicals and on the size of the movement. Chapters 2 and 3 surveyed the radical movement, describing and discussing the teachers' groups and their publications, the school students' movement, and a number of other organisations. Chapter 4 was a study of free schools.

The primary purpose of those first four chapters was descriptive. I considered it worthwhile in itself to collect this information and put it 'on record'. I offer it as a contribution towards the descriptive history of the period. These chapters were not intended to demonstrate any major thesis beyond the fact that a discernible radical movement existed. This is, nonetheless, a fact worth establishing because there is already a tendency for accounts of educational developments in the 1960s and 1970s to disregard the radical movement, or refer to it only in footnotes. Thus, for example, the authors of *Unpopular Education*, whose aim was "to understand the ways in which educational politics have been constructed in England... during the post-second world war period" [1] make only the slightest references to the radical movement, even though those authors' perspective was avowedly radical. They

mention only four of the 14 radical teachers groups, and then only in passing. They do not mention the school students' movement or free schools at all.

Similarly, a section of an Open University course entitled *Liberal and Radical Alternatives* mentions, of all the radical groups and publications, only the deschoolers [2]. To cite one further case, Ken Jones, in his study *Beyond Progressive Education* refers only to *Radical Education*, Rank & File, the Socialist Teachers' Alliance and *Teaching London Kids*. These few groups represent neither the width nor the depth of the movement which sought to move 'beyond progressive education'.

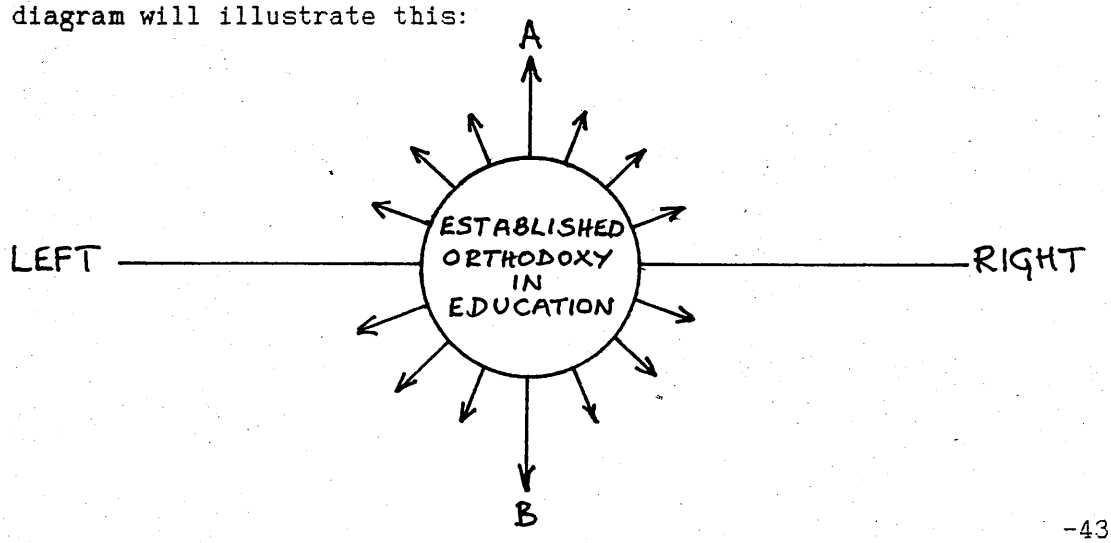
Since there is a tendency for academic studies to discuss phenomena in terms of other academic accounts of them, there is a danger that phenomena (such as the radical movement in question) which don't find a place in the academic literature can simply be forgotten by history.

There were also a number of secondary purposes in the first four chapters. One was to set out the 'raw material' (to use the term 'data' would imply that my material is quantifiable, which it rarely is) upon which an assessment of the contribution made by the various sectors of the radical movement might be based. It is not my intention here to attempt such an assessment, which would depend heavily upon one's resolution of the dilemmas set out in chapter 5. For example, revolutionary Marxists might judge that Rank & File made a more important contribution than, say, *Teaching London Kids*. Those, on the other hand, who feel that the most important thing was to develop a radical practice in the classroom would value *Teaching London Kids*' contribution more highly. Those who hold that a truly radical practice can only be developed outside the constraints of the state system might

well regard the efforts of the free schools as more significant. And so forth. It will be clear, therefore, that for me to undertake an evaluation of the contribution of the different sectors would first require me to argue a case for one side or other in each of the radical dilemmas. Although this was to be part of my project as I initially envisaged it, from the vantage point now reached it is a task well beyond the scope of this thesis.

Another secondary purpose of my early chapters concerns this question: if the views of the different groupings were so disparate, if the radical movement was so divided by the dilemmas, does it make any sense to talk of a 'movement' at all? The word 'movement' conjures up an image of a one-dimensional trend - an image, perhaps, of a river. To be sure it has eddies and currents, but there is a common overall direction. Given this image, it is indeed questionable whether it is right to talk of *the* radical movement. However, I would like to suggest an alternative image: that of a centrifugal movement.

If we think of established orthodoxy (and let us assume that there is a single such thing in British education) represented by the centre of a circle, we can think of the radical movement as a variety of attempts to move away from this, albeit in different directions. A simple diagram will illustrate this:



This model has two immediate merits. First, it is consonant with the fact, which I have frequently mentioned, that the radicals were surer of what they were trying to get away *from* than where they were going *to*. Second, it allows us to consider *right-wing* radicalism (such as the *Black Papers* or the 'new right' of the 1980s) as a complementary phenomenon to the left-wing radicalism which is the subject of this study.

The vertical A-B axis could be taken to be the opposing dimensions of any of the radical dilemmas outlined in chapter 5 - libertarianism-authoritarianism, for example, or reform-revolution. (To incorporate all these axes in a single model would require a multi-dimensional model which I am unable to conceptualise).

It will be noted that I have presumed that the one axis which creates a fundamental differentiation is the 'left-right' axis. Of course it is possible to contest this: many other systems of thought (for example, mystical systems) would not regard the distinction between political right and political left as a very fundamental distinction. However, if there was one thing upon which the different segments of the radical movement could agree, it was that they were of the left and against the right. In other words, the left-right distinction was axiomatic for the radical movement.

My claim therefore is that we *can* talk of the radical movement if we imagine that movement as centrifugal rather than uni-dimensional. But there is another way of seeing it as a movement: that is to see it in terms of the questions it asked, rather than in terms of the answers it offered to those questions (on which it was deeply divided). In other words, the movement may be defined in terms of its agenda. The

questions which the radical movement asked are set out in Appendix A (page 461). It would be misleading to claim that all radicals were in complete agreement on the agenda. We saw in chapter 5 how the 'qualitists', for example, asked questions which the 'quantitists' did not (page 233 ff). But there need be no doubt that there was a sufficiently common agenda for the movement to be thought of as an entity.

A third purpose of my first four chapters was to probe some of the weaknesses in the radical movement; this is, after all, a *critical* study. This probing sought to spotlight certain themes, some of which were dealt with in chapters 5 to 8, and some of which I will consider shortly. I will review these themes now, under three headings: organisational matters, strategic matters, and philosophical/theoretical issues.

ORGANISATIONAL MATTERS

The groups within the radical movement encountered a number of organisational problems: shortage of resources, both in terms of money and of volunteers willing to take on a work-load; the hyper-activity of people involved in the groups (possibly a manifestation of 'workaholism' of certain groups in contemporary society); and problems of internal organisation, particularly a tension between efficiency and democracy. Radical magazines had particular difficulties, of presentation (which I will discuss shortly) and distribution. Commercial distributors were not interested in small-circulation radical magazines which offered them only a small margin per copy. The unsolved problem was how to break out from a limited readership of

ardent supporters to reach the great mass of potential 'converts' which was presumed to exist.

There was a surprising lack of link-ups between the different radical groupings both within and outside the field of education. There was no radical equivalent of the New Education Fellowship (renamed the World Education Fellowship in 1965) which served as an umbrella for progressive educationists for many years. And it may not be easy for those who were not involved in the radical movement to appreciate the extent and ferocity of the bickering and 'in-fighting' which went on both within groups and between them. To some extent this was, no doubt, an historical legacy: we saw in chapter 1 how several by no means perfectly compatible currents came together in the movement. And we may hypothesise too that the sheer lack of success of the movement would lead to frustration and differences of opinion about how to move forward.

STRATEGIC MATTERS

In the course of my exploration of radical groups a number of strategic issues emerged as significant, in particular the matters of power base and timing.

The chief strategic weakness of the radical movement was that it lacked a *power base*. By power base I mean any significantly large section of the population which is collectively able to exert social or political or economic influence. A pressure group can draw on that power base if it is acting in the perceived interests of that section of the population. Of the radical groups surveyed in chapters 2, 3 and 4, a few did see the need for a power base, even if they were not very

successful in building on it. Rank & File gained a base in several NUT local associations, and in the NUT Young Teachers' Section. *Teaching London Kids* had a base amongst teachers of English and amongst progressive London teachers. The Schools Action Union and the National Union of School Students sought to build a power base amongst school students - certainly a numerically large section of the population, albeit with little political or economic influence. Free schools sought their power base in their local communities but, as we have seen, few succeeded in doing so.

The radical movement can be seen as a 'vanguard' (or 'avant garde') which took the lead in the hope that others would follow. But it was not clear about how it would persuade others to follow, nor what it would do if they failed to follow.

The movement saw itself as representing the interests of those who suffered from the wrongs of schooling, and it defined these as the working class, ethnic minorities and, rather later, girls and women. But, as we have seen, the movement was not successful in gaining any significant working class or ethnic minority support. (It was relatively more successful in gaining a following amongst women, but even here it cannot claim to have gained a mass following.) This would appear to raise the same questions which have troubled the left as a whole in the 1980s: questions about the validity of thinking of the working class as a progressive political entity, and about the apparent gulf between the interests of the working class as left-wingers define them and as working class people themselves perceive them. The same questions may be asked of ethnic minorities - and of women.

It is possible for radicals to explain their failure to win working class support as a failure of *communication* rather than incorrect political analysis. And certainly there was such a failure. Radicals had virtually no access to the means of mass communication. The means available to them - meetings, small magazines, books, leaflets and pamphlets, word of mouth, demonstrations - were simply not appropriate for winning mass support under contemporary conditions. And the radical movement made matters even worse for itself in that such attempts it did make to communicate were unlikely to make a favourable impression on the mass of people it hoped to win over. Too little attention was given to the 'psychology of conversion' [3]. Of all the radical publications, only the books of A.S.Neill, John Holt and R.F.Mackenzie, the short-lived *Children's Rights* magazine, and a handful of school students' publications, were clearly addressed to the generality of people. The others appeared to be addressed to specialists (particularly teachers and academics) or to people who already thought of themselves as committed radicals.

In matters of strategy, *timing* is crucial. It is clear that the radical movement was overtaken by events. A product of the 1960s, the movement did not reach its peak until well into the 1970s, by which time the climate had changed decisively. We saw in chapter 4 how free schools came too late, and in chapter 2 how *Radical Education* set out in 1974 "to give voice to the revolt against the educational system of today" but very soon found itself embroiled in defending that same system against the growing tide of reaction. Similarly, the solid theoretical analyses which the radical movement required only began to come together in the 1970s - perhaps ten years after they were needed.

It is not easy to pin-point the exact moment when the tide began to turn. The first *Black Paper* in 1969 was a 'warning shot'. The Conservative victory in the 1970 general election was a pointer, and the 1973 Yom Kippur war - with the consequent enormous rise in oil prices and subsequent world economic recession - undermined the expansion which had been, arguably, the economic basis of the radicalism of the 1960s. The return of a Labour Government in 1974 did not mark a reversal of the trend (as the choice of Reginald Prentice as Secretary of State for Education indicated); and James Callaghan's October 1976 speech at Ruskin College, Oxford, was widely perceived as marking the final capitulation of the 'progressive consensus' to the 'back to the basics' lobby [4]. Significantly, Shirley Williams' 'Great Debate' which followed the Ruskin speech, with its hand-picked participants, included no representation from the radical movement. The time had passed. In 1976 White Lion Free School reported:

> ... the excitement and energy of radical educational reform, so strong a few years ago, seems to have been dissipated. [5]

Before leaving the matter of strategy, it will be useful to refer back to three of the characteristics of the radicals which, I have had cause to suggest at several points in this study, may have handicapped the progress of the radical movement.

First, radicals were intent on undermining conventional assumptions. But if too many assumptions are challenged, the basis of communication can be undermined. For example, an article by White Lion Street Free School's founders was entitled 'Abolishing the Curriculum and Learning Without Exams' [6]. Such a programme would have been incomprehensible to all those who equate a good education with learning a conventional curriculum and passing examinations. Radicals find themselves in this

bind: their thinking depends upon a wholesale rejection of hallowed assumptions. But these assumptions form the very basis of many people's - possibly most people's - understanding of what education is. At one level the central difficulty for radicals is escaping this bind.

Second, the determined 'oppositionism' of radicals "frozen in a posture of non-involvement" may have prevented them from finding constructive ways forward. A radical movement can too easily degenerate into a movement of - to quote Cardinal Newman's words inappropriately - "psalm droners and canting groaners". The reason I have given so much attention to free schools in this study is that they stand out in having attempted to find constructive ways forward and pursued their aims without constantly falling back on blaming some obdurate faction (headteachers, LEAs, government, union leaderships) or some syndrome ('apathy', 'false consciousness') for their difficulties.

Third, we have at several points observed how radicals' commitment to *principles*, and their refusal at any price to compromise them, has seemed to rule out any feasible way forward in the given circumstances. This led, not infrequently, to a characteristic 'auto-destruct' of radical ventures. It is not clear what interests are served by such auto-destruction except that the participants can come away feeling that at least their hands are clean. It is too late in this study to start exploring the parallel here with certain kinds of religious thinking, but it would be an interesting line of enquiry. 'Faith' and 'individual salvation' would seem to be relevant religious concepts.

Thus far I have been drawing together points which emerged from the first four chapters of my study. I now wish to move on to the issues dealt with in chapters 5 to 8, and in doing so reach some conclusions

about the central concern of this chapter.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

In the first four chapters I touched, in passing, upon a number of theoretical or philosophical issues which, I suggested, needed further examination. In the next four chapters I looked at certain of these issues in greater depth. I propose now to summarise the most important substantive issues which have arisen, in order to suggest areas for further study.

1. *Class Analysis*

The tenet that class is the central, the most fundamental, educational parameter exercised a powerful influence on the way many radicals thought about education, as well on radical strategy. Thus, when addressing the question of why schooling is such an unsatisfactory process for many children, the immmediate impulse of most sections of the British radical movement (but not the Americans) was to offer answers in terms of class: some variant on the theme that schooling discriminates against working class children. Certainly there is ample sociological evidence that class is *an* important parameter. But I have had cause at several points in this study to query, not whether class is a relevant concern, for it surely is, but whether the particular class analyses favoured by the radicals helped or hindered them in their search for an understanding of the process of schooling. Giving pride of place to a class analysis may have led radicals to overlook other dimensions of the education question which have litle or no relation to social class. For example, in chapter 8 I discussed the

educational significance of the women's movement: it does not seem reducible to a class analysis. And in chapters 6 and 7 I examined several issues raised by free schooling which again are not reducible to questions of class. My conclusion is that the assumptions about class which were taken for granted by radicals are ripe for review.

2. *The role of the state*

In chapter 5 I outlined the debate within the radical movement about state education and whether radicals should work 'within the system' or not. But nowhere in the radical literature can there be found a sustained attempt to analyse this question or establish some solid theoretical ground on which a resolution of the debate might be based. A thorough analysis of the relationship between the state and education would therefore be of value [7].

It is incumbent upon those who draw a distinction between the capitalist state and the socialist state, and who claim that no significant educational reforms can be achieved within the former, to demonstrate this rather than merely assert it.

3. *Culture*

If radicals had a choice about whether or not to work 'within the system' (and the fact that this choice exists requires an explanation from those who hold 'iron grip' theories about the relationship between capitalism, the state and education), they had no choice about working within the culture as it existed at the moment. Indeed many radical dilemmas can be seen as springing from the contradictions of having to live within a culture whilst trying to transform it.

Over the past 15 years a great deal of work has been done, from explicitly radical standpoints, on the question of culture [8]. I have not reviewed it in this study: it came rather too late to have an impact on the radical movement which is my subject. Culture has become a central concern for radicals - perhaps more so than class, though the two are related - and the task which needs now to be done is to incorporate the theoretical work on culture into the radical analysis. In the last chapter I explored the concept of 'critical re-evaluation' and pointed out some of the difficulties associated with it. Further work is needed on that.

4. *Education, Society and Children*

At several points we have noted a lack of concern amongst radicals about the relationship between education and society. For example, we have seen how free schools shied away from the question, and in the last chapter I suggested that certain radical views of learning neglected the social dimensions of learning. Those radicals who *did* address the relationship between education and society often then failed to bring children into the equation.

I sought in the last chapter to show how easily theories of learning can overlook the social nature of learning and the relationship between education and society. Not only can individuals not exist outside of society (except for exceptional, and essentially short-term, feats of endurance) but more importantly progress (which is what radicals want) cannot take place outside of society. Any analysis of education must therefore incorporate a theory of the relationship between education and society. This point only needs making because much radical thinking has ignored it.

Similarly, there is a need to keep children in the picture. In chapter 5 I warned against the simplicism of talking of 'the point of view of the child', but there remains a need to take into account what we know about children and how they live and learn. This is much more than simply asserting that children are 'naturally' this or 'naturally' that. Observation of children - and there is now a vast body of empirical evidence in this area - must inform any theory of education and hence point the way to a successful practice.

5. *Libertarian Non-Intervention*

In chapter 4 I examined in some detail the libertarian case for non-intervention. Its central weakness lies in the notion of 'leaving children to themselves'. Whether a serviceable theory can be salvaged despite the various flaws I pointed out, I do not know. But I hope I have laid down a challenge to libertarians to re-examine this central tenet.

6. *Ethical Questions*

The radical movement raised a host of ethical questions, but I have identified three which would repay further attention. The first is whether ends can justify means. Is it right, for example, for a free school to expel one difficult child so that the remaining children experience less disruption? The second is whether one can be relieved of the moral onus for some incident if one has refrained from any action in the lead-up to that incident. For example, if an adult takes no action to stop a bully, how far is that adult responsible for the harm the bully inflicts? Third, are the rights and wrongs of an action to be judged by whether they are right or wrong in themselves (that is,

deontologically) or by whether they have good or bad consequences? For example, am I justified in forcibly restraining a bully, or is the use of forcible restraint unjustified in itself?

Ethics has not been a central concern of this study, and I do not want to enter the field at this stage. But clearly there are ethical questions which radicals need to address.

7. The Place of the Non-Rational

There is no need to add to the discussion in chapter 5 of the claims for acknowledgement of the non-rational side of human experience. It is a topic which requires further exploration.

8. Epistemology

In chapter 8 I touched upon the radicals' interest in epistemology, briefly describing the areas of debate. Kevin Harris has argued that

> Epistemological theories... are neither necessary nor sufficient to establish conclusions about education. They are neither necessary nor sufficient even to establish conclusions about the *content* of education. [9]

but the fact that Harris manages to write 190 pages on the subject of 'education and knowledge' demonstrates that a consideration of epistemological questions is *relevant* to educational debate. One of the pillars of the radicals' critique of conventional schooling was that such schooling rested upon a false epistemology. And yet the radicals' attempts to prove this were not decisive. It is an avenue of enquiry which remains wide open.

9. *Learning*

Because I was unable to discuss every aspect of the radicals' ideas about education, I took in chapter 8 the question of learning as a case study. I argued that, *pace* Neill and others, a proper understanding of learning is essential if an effective radical practice is to be found. This presents a major challenge to radicals, because there exists a very large body of work on learning which needs to be taken into account.

THE CHALLENGE TO RADICALS

The Need for Theory

My presumption throughout this study has been that the radical case requires a sound theoretical justification. The nine topics I have just listed represent a selection of topics which have emerged in the course of this study as 'problem areas' for radicals: areas in which the radical argument needs to be reconsidered if it is to carry conviction. It is possible, of course, to take the view that no amount of further study can produce a justification for the radical case because it is, quite simply, wrong. And this seems to me to pose a legitimate challenge to radicals: a challenge to put their theoretical house in order if they can. I have tried to point out some of topics radicals need to address. As it stands, it is difficult to reach very definite conclusions about the theory of radical education because that theory is chronically underdeveloped. This became clear, for example, at the Auld Inquiry into the 'William Tyndale affair' where the teachers proved unable to articulate a coherent defence of the rationale underlying their practice [10].

Now there is a tenacious current within radical education which dismisses theory as a luxury which diverts us from the real task of changing the world. Thus a book review in the Winter 1987 issue of *Lib Ed* (one of the very few radical journals of the 1960s and 1970s to have survived) says:

> Unfortunately, after years of research all she [author Tuula Gordon] has produced is a work of academic Marxist sociology that will be inaccessible to the great majority of teachers, a work that is geared more to the arcane debates that exercise academics than to the concerns of the classroom... One problem with much academic Marxism is that it is concerned with understanding the world, often in deliberately obscure language, and seems to contribute little to trying to change it.[11]

Lib Ed is not a Marxist journal and we must make allowances for that. But there is an implicit appeal in this passage to Marx's eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach ("The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point however is to *change* it."). It was quite common for radicals to quote this sentence as if Marx was saying 'enough of all this philosophy, let's get on and change the world'. Of course, Marx was saying nothing of the sort. Rather, he was trying to summarise the previous ten Theses which dealt with the philosophy of practice, the relationship between ideas and material reality, and the effects on men (and men's thought) of their attempts to change the world. Marx would hardly have spent all those years in the reading room of the British Museum if he did not believe that his struggle to understand the world was integral to his struggle to change it. The creation of un-necessary oppositions - as between understanding and changing in the passage quoted above - is, as we have often seen in this study, something which radicals were rather prone to do.

To say this is not to commend the 'obscure language' and 'arcane academicism' of which *Lib Ed* complains. But radicals must face this real difficulty: that it may not be possible for theory to be both

profound and accessible at the same time. Radicals are in a dilemma if they want to involve the mass of people in the radical transformation of society, whilst the theoretical understanding required for that transformation is very difficult. One way out of the difficulty lies in an 'intelligensia' who understand the theory and who attempt to interpret it in a way which the generality of people can understand. An alternative way - and this was an aspiration of the older radical tradition which was all but lost in the 1960s - would be to bring the education of the mass of people to a level where they could understand the difficult theories for themselves. Whatever the answer may be, it seems to me to be a mistake for radicals to refuse to participate in the theoretical debate on the grounds that many people are unfortunately excluded from it.

There is one respect, at least, in which radical theory would differ from much mainstream theory. This is that it would be located within a *practice - theory - practice* model. Theoretical analysis would start from, and end with, practical experience in the day-to-day world. The questions which radical theory asks are not abstract questions, but questions which arise from real problems we have encountered. And the answers which such theory offers must be answers which have implications for practice in the day-to-day world. Ideally, this theoretical work is done by people who have been practitioners themselves, have taken time off to do theoretical work related to their practice, and then return to the field of practice to use their theory.[12]

Radical theory may be distinctive in two other respects: it will usually be interdisciplinary; and it will start from axioms of its own choosing [13].

Having said that, there is every reason to think that radical theory will sometimes be 'difficult' in the sense that some people will not easily understand it. Those who take Marx's Theses on Feuerbach as their guide will not be deterred by this: if interpreting the world is difficult, so is changing it. Radicals who decline challenges on the grounds of difficulty would also, presumably, decline the challenge of changing the world.

There is one further point to be added about radical theory. We might debate the issue of whether such a theory would be ideology-free or simply located within an *alternative* ideology. I cannot explore this debate here, but even if we concede that radical theory is ideological (in the dictionary sense of a body of ideas that reflects the beliefs and interests of political radicalism), it does not follow that it need not be worked-out, coherent, rigorous and credible.

History

As we have seen in earlier chapters, a consciousness of the history of educational radicalism was unevenly spread across the radical movement. It is worth recollecting these words of Sir John Adams, written in 1922:

> We are not to forget that in our work, as elsewhere, there is the periodic rise and fall of tendencies. Those who have studied the history of medicine tell us that certain modes of treatment rise, spread, and disappear for a time, only to repeat at later periods the same process with slight modifications. A skilful student of the history of education could supply many illustrations of this periodicity in the case of our craft.
>
> It is unpleasant to think of educational movement being a mere recurrent series of waves, unless we can be sure that each wave rises a little higher than its predecessor.[14]

I have been concerned throughout this study to show, when possible,

how contemporary radical ideas were restatements of much older ideas - of Godwin, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, for example. The oldest I have found is Holt's restatement of Cicero (see footnote 46, page 421) although of course many contemporary educational debates were foreshadowed by Plato and Aristotle.

Radical theory needs to be informed by history in a rather broader sense than merely knowing about what went before. To have a 'sense of history' is to be conscious that our predicament at this moment is an historical predicament; to attempt an historical understanding is to attempt to understand how we have arrived at the present conjuncture. Much of the radical literature is written in a tone of breathless astonishment, as if the writer is at a loss to comprehend how schools and teachers could be so senseless. History can help to show the sense behind the 'senselessness' (if it be that); understanding *why* things are as they are will help in the quest for changes.

Empirical Evidence

Radicals were somewhat wary of the use of empirical evidence, often ready to point out the feebleness of much educational research and eager, too, to point out the pitfalls of 'empiricism' and 'positivism'. But there was an ambivalence about this; when an empirical study appeared which added weight to radical arguments, radicals were not unready to seize upon it. Two notable examples were Rosenthal and Jacobson's work on teacher expectations [15] and Milgram's work on deference to authority [16]. But in general the radical case was thin on empirical backing: as we have noted, the Campaign on Racism, IQ and the Class Society was exceptional in this respect. There was, I think, a prevailing belief that radical truths could be established *a priori* -

by reasoning from first principles.

This is not the place to discuss empiricism and positivism. I do not claim that all arguments (or even many arguments) can be resolved by recourse to empirical evidence if I suggest that the radical case might be greatly strengthened if it could draw upon sound empirical evidence. (Equally, of course, the radical case might be refuted by the empirical evidence which is available). To be sure, there should be discrimination between 'good research' evidence and 'bad research' evidence and it would be legitimate for radicals to include under 'bad research' all research which leaves conventional assumptions unquestioned. Thus, for example, Neville Bennett's attempt to assess children's 'creativity' by setting them an essay to be written in 30 minutes [17] need not take up much attention.

The selective use of evidence, however feeble, to bolster a case is a feature of all partisan writing on education - left and right - and in my opinion the radical cause would benefit from avoiding this. Attention should be given to the evidence which appears to refute the radical case. As I pointed out in chapter 1, radicals often seemed to be trying to build a case impervious to all conceivable onslaughts. Some people find the knock of Jehovah's Witnesses at the front door a tiresome thing, not because they dislike a good argument about religion, but because they know that *nothing* can be said which would cause the Jehovah's Witnesses to re-consider their beliefs. No doubt there were those who found radicals in education tiresome for a similar reason; radicals might do well to specify what kind of evidence - if it were available - could demonstrate that they were wrong. For one thing, they would then be in a moral position to make a similar requirement of their opponents. More importantly, radicals cannot expect people to

take seriously their claim that they are right if there are no circumstances under which they could be shown to be wrong.

Engaging with Orthodox Theory

There were some commendable radical attempts to criticise mainstream theory of education [18] but by and large the radicals' preference was simply to ignore mainstream theory. There are, however, a number of reasons why radicals might want to pay serious attention to such theory. First, they may be surprised to find some material there which could be drawn upon to consolidate their own theory. Second, even when there is not, a critical study can greatly help to clarify the mind. (Critique was, of course, one of Marx's favourite methods). Third, radicals need to tease out the weaknesses of mainstream theory for a reason I will illustrate with an anecdote. When I started teaching, an 'untrained graduate' with no knowledge at all of education theory, I asked a fellow probationary teacher, just out of teacher training college, what philosophy guided her classroom practice. In response she brought me, the next day, a copy of R.S.Peters' *Ethics and Education*. "What does it say?" I asked her. Her answer was: "Oh I don't know, I haven't read it, but it's all in there". Although practitioners may have only a hazy notion of the theory which underpins their practice, they are comforted in their adherence to convention by the knowledge that someone 'up there in the Institute' *has* thought it all out and given the go-ahead. That is why radicals need to assemble a theoretical critique to stand alongside their critique of schooling and classroom practice.

There is an asymmetry which is, in a sense, 'unfair'. Practices which are long established by custom and tradition (such as the English

school curriculum) do not need to be justified by a sound theory. If the Secretary of State were to declare that no school may re-assemble after the holidays until all its practices have been shown to have a rigorous theoretical justification, it could be some time before many schools re-opened. Yet competing paradigms - especially radical paradigms - are subjected to theoretical scrutiny and do have to 'prove themselves' if many people are to take them seriously; unless, that is, the proponents of such competing paradigms have the political power to impose their schemes regardless of whether they are credible or not. The radical movement which is the subject of this study had no such power, and it was therefore all the more incumbent upon it to produce convincing theoretical justification.

Conceptual analysis

I have pointed out in previous chapters the reliance of radicals on a number of key words - 'freedom', 'natural', 'spontaneous', 'needs', 'wants', 'interests', 'relevance', 'ideology', 'culture', 'authority', 'equality' and so forth. It is easy to show how the unguarded use of such terms leads to unsustainable positions [19]. To some extent the radical case would be improved if there were an embargo on the use of such concepts, but it is extremely difficult to imagine a radical case which didn't employ these words. The alternative, then, is for a rigorous conceptual analysis to clarify what these terms mean for radicals and what they do not.

That completes my survey of the questions which have been raised by this study which require further examination. What it amounts to is a research programme. There is, of course, a long-standing joke about

research projects (such as this one) which end up with proposals for a research programme. This study has, I hope, been of value for two reasons: first, it has demonstrated the *need* for further research into the radical case. The point is that such a need has not until now (to my knowledge) been widely recognised [20]. Second, I have pointed out a number of clear directions which such research could take, shown why they are relevant and how they fit into the general picture.

Whether or not such research will be undertaken is a different question. At the present moment in history, when resources for research are hardly freely available, the case for research into this subject area may seem a weak one: something of a luxury, perhaps. At the time of writing (1988) the preoccupations of the educational world seem far removed from the concerns of the radicals of the 1960s and 1970s. The issues of the day are the national curriculum, standards, efficiency, testing, the need for schooling to enhance industrial and technological competetiveness; the rights of parents (defined, it would appear, as rights to refuse any educational development smacking of progressivism: little has been heard of parents' rights to opt out of the national curriculum or withdraw their children from national testing schemes); and the proper place of LEAs vis-a-vis the control of schools.

But Sir John Adams, quoted above, was surely right in pointing to the periodicity of educational developments. If history repeats itself, we might anticipate that educational radicalism will within the next 20 years or so, enjoy a return to (comparative) favour as it did in the 1890s, the 1920s, and the 1960s. If that happens (and it is an if: history is made by people) then we could expect the radical concerns which have been the subject of this study to once again become public concerns. When that time arrives this thesis will hopefully be of some

interest, waiting to be brought up from the vaults and dusted down.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RADICAL MOVEMENT

There are many ways of assessing the significance of a movement. One might judge it by the numbers of people involved, by its success in changing the course of events, or by the importance of its ideas as a contribution to the history of ideas. The ultimate judgement, perhaps, can only be made by history. But what can we say of the radical movement on these three counts?

As we saw in chapter 1, the radical movement in education was, in numerical terms, a small one. Even of teachers - the most active participants - only a very small percentage were involved. The radical movement was not a mass movement; its significance can not be found in numbers.

To judge the impact of the radical movement on the course of events is a difficult task. In *Fifty Years of Freedom* Ray Hemmings reported on his attempts to assess the impact of A.S.Neill on practice in schools by questionnaire survey of head-teachers. The information he solicited was interesting but inconclusive. A majority of respondents felt that Neill had had an influence somewhere between 'marginal' and 'quite noticeable' [21]. In principle it might be possible by means of a major research investigation to form some judgement of the impact of the radical movement on practice in schools, although the difficulties would be legion. One might hypothesise that the continued momentum of progressive education into the 1980s, in the face of the anti-progressive backlash, owes something to the spirit and energy of the

radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s. In this connection we might point to the survival of comprehensive schooling (at least until 1988) in the face of concerted opposition; to the continuance of mixed-ability groupings; to the continued existence of progressive primary schools (in the Plowden sense) in many areas; the arrival of the General Certificate of Secondary Education; to curriculum developments such as peace studies, world development studies, and anti-sexist and anti-racist initiatives; and to the abolition of corporal punishment in maintained schools. It has been suggested (page 148) that there has been a growing acceptance of pupil participation in secondary school decision-making, though I know of no clear evidence that this has occurred on any wide scale. If indeed such developments have taken place (and one could start with a survey of the reports of HMIs; I have not done this) it would still be hard to establish what contribution, if any, was made by the radical movement.

It is possible to argue that progressive developments were in fact *hindered* by the radical movement which tarred them with the brush of 'extremism'. Conversely, one could suggest that radicalism, in its 'extremism', made progressivism look decidedly level-headed by comparison, and thus helped to make progressivism more widely acceptable. I am in no position to give body to such speculations.

A small number of developments can plausibly be claimed to be direct results of the radical movement, because we can identify their specific genesis there. There can be little doubt that the Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment (STOPP) played a major role in the ending of corporal punishment, at first in a growing number of LEAs, and finally in all maintained schools. The major review of the content of children's books originated in the radical movement (see pages

160/161). And the growing interest in the education of children outside of schools, associated with Education Otherwise, can be traced to the radical disaffection with schools in the early 1970s. To this we might add the growth of multi-cultural and anti-racist education - the 1985 Swann Report acknowledged that its antecedents lay in the thinking of the 1960s [22]. And perhaps most striking of all, we should point to the attempts to eliminate sexism from schooling, although it would be wrong for the radical movement to claim this as 'all its own work' because, as we have seen, it took a long time for the women's movement to get the radical movement to espouse their cause.

There have been other developments at a local level which seem to be directly attributable to the influence of the radical movement. I am thinking particularly of the practice, now established in many LEAs, of having secondary school pupils (and in some areas, primary school pupils) on the governing bodies of schools.

Finally, a list of the tangible successes of the radical movement might well include certain conceptual shifts. One example is the distinction - by no means universal, but quite widespread - between 'schooling' and 'education'. Another example is that 'equality of opportunity' has come to be seen as problematic [23].

A potentially fruitful line of enquiry might be to trace developments in the careers and attitudes of individuals who were involved in the radical movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Where are they now? There are people who abandoned the oppositionist stance and moved into positions of influence within the education service - whether as headteachers or senior teachers, as advisers, in teachers' centres and curriculum development projects, in teacher training, in educational research, in

support centres, as governors of schools, or as LEA councillors or officers. It would be interesting to know how far they felt they had been able to promote their radical ideas, or conversely how far they had been obliged to abandon, compromise or modify their radicalism; or if they had 'seen the error of their ways' and renounced radicalism before taking positions of influence.

Collecting evidence on these questions has not formed part of this study and I am not therefore able to offer any firmly grounded judgements as to the impact of the radical movement on practice in schools.

A third count on which the radical movement might be assessed is its contribution to the history of ideas. Although it is plain that few of the ideas of the 1960s and 1970s were *new* ideas, the radical movement served the purpose of bringing them back to public attention. I believe it is possible to trace a number of developments within the academic study of education to that movement. The radical movement helped to 'open up' certain territory which had previously been little explored. Or, to put it another way, the radical movement posed certain questions which it had previously been thought un-necessary to ask.

As we have already noted, the first two developments within the academic study to bear the hallmarks of the radical movement were the 'new sociology of education' [24] and the renewed interest in the history of working class education. These were followed rapidly by the development of a number of lines of enquiry, predominantly within the fields of history and sociology, which had an explicitly radical outlook [25]. Even work which was not explicitly radical acknowledged the influence of radical writers [26]. And, finally, we should mention

in this context all the work which has been done on race and gender over the past 15 years or so [27].

It might be argued that such avenues of enquiry would have opened up even if there had been no radical movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Certainly, all of them have a pedigree which pre-dates the 1960s. Or one might equally argue that the radical movement *and* these lines of academic enquiry were both manifestations of the same 'spirit of the age'. I do not know how these questions might be resolved, but there need be little doubt that there was some kind of relationship between the two phenomena. There is a demonstrable overlap of personnel: one can name individuals who were active in the radical movement who were, or became later, academic researchers in the fields I have outlined.

There is one final count on which one might judge the significance of the radical movement. That is the impact it made on those who were involved. That old Olympic motto "The important thing is not to have won but to have taken part" reminds us that, whether or not the movement changed the world in any major way, it certainly changed the thousands of people who were active in it.

If it is true that, in Holly's words

> ...educational development is an untidy series of temporary accommodations between conflicting economic and political interests. [28]

then it would be best to think of the radical movement as just one amongst many pressures which between them push schooling, and the study of it, in this or that direction. A history of educational development which overlooks any of these individual pressures is an incomplete history, but the judgement as to which were the decisive pressures is not one which can be made until a very considerable length of time has

elapsed.

It is a requisite of social movements which set out to change the world that they must be decisive and single-minded. Perhaps one of the profounder difficulties of the radicals of the 1960s and 1970s was that, behind the superficial bravado of their assertions, they lacked that degree of inner conviction that they knew what was right which is so often a feature of those who make their mark on history. The radical literature is full of confessions of doubt, but those who express doubt are easily pushed aside by those who don't. And yet the only legitimate overall conclusion which can be drawn from this study is, I believe, one of doubt or open-mindedness. If there comes a time when radical ideas about education come back into favour, it seems likely that they will do so not as a result of certainty about them - certainty that they are in some sense 'true' - but rather as a result of a renewed round of uncertainty and doubt about the conventional ideas and practices which radicals seek to displace.

NOTES

1. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies *Unpopular Education* page 8.
2. Open University Course E202, Unit 31, Block VI: *Liberal and Radical Alternatives*. The only radical sources referred to are Illich's *Deschooling Society*, Lister's *Deschooling*, Bowles' and Gintis' *Schooling in Capitalist America* and an article by Jonathan Kozol. None of these were representative of the radical movement, especially in England. All the other references given in the Unit are academic. The author of the Unit, Roger Dale, was by no means unaware of the British radical literature, having contributed articles to it himself.

3. There has, of course, been a long-running debate about this on the left, a debate which has centred on the rights and wrongs of using various techniques of persuasion. The 1987 General Election saw the Labour Party, for the first time for 30 years, use the full array of contemporary means of persuasion. Opinions vary as to how much good it did it.

4. James Callaghan's Ruskin speech was reprinted in *Education* 22.10.76, pages 332-333. For comment on it, see Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies *op cit* chapter 10; Ken Jones *Beyond Progressive Education* chapter 4; Steven Goldberg and Peter Griffiths 'Double Talk' in *Teaching London Kids* 9, pages 5-6; and 'Who Controls The Curriculum?' in *Teachers Action* 7, pages 13-17.

5. White Lion Street Free School *Bulletin* 4, page 5.

6. Peter Newell and Alison Truefitt 'Abolishing the Curriculum and Learning Without Exams' in Peter Buckman (ed) *Education Without Schools*.

7. See Ralph Milliband *The State in Capitalist Society*.

8. For example by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies; see also the journal *Schooling and Culture*.

9. Kevin Harris *Education and Knowledge* page 138.

10. Robin Auld *William Tyndale Junior and Infants School Public Enquiry: A Report to the Inner London Education Authority*.

11. 'The Death of a Comprehensive School' in *Lib Ed* Vol 2 No 6, page 18.

12. This resembles the model of 'in-service training' except that in-service trainees are usually expected to study already existing theory rather than generate new theory for themselves.

13 For an example of such a choice of axioms, see the quotation from Raymond Williams in footnote 57, page 422.

14. Sir John Adams *Modern Developments in Educational Practice* page 11.

15. R. Rosenthal and L. Jacobson *Pygmalion in the Classroom*. Radicals

seemed willing to overlook the flaws in *this* educational research: see Robert Thorndike's review of it in *American Educational Research Journal* November 1968, page 708 ff.

16. Stanley Milgram *Obedience to Authority*

17. See Nigel Wright *Progress in Education* page 45.

18. For example Keith Paton *The Great Brain Robbery*; George Dennison's critique of Jerome Bruner in *The Lives of Children*; and the journal *Radical Education*.

19. Robin Barrow *Radical Education* supplies many examples.

20. In contrast, research into *progressive* education has, at certain times in history, and especially in the United States of America, been undertaken on a large scale.

21. Ray Hemmings *Fifty Years of Freedom* page 198.

22. *Education for All* (The Swann Report) page vii.

23. See Ted Benton 'Education and Politics' in Douglas Holly (ed) *Education or Domination*.

24. Michael F.D. Young (ed) *Knowledge and Control*; R.K. Brown (ed) *Knowledge, Education and Cultural Change*.

25. The literature is quite large: a random list which gives the flavour would be: Michael Flude and John Ahier (eds) *Educability, Schools and Ideology*; R. Sharp and A. Green *Education and Social Control;* Paul Corrigan *Schooling the Smash Street Kids;* Paul Willis *Learning to Labour*; Madan Sarup *Marxism, Structuralism and Education*; Ted Tapper and Brian Salter *Education and the Political Order*. The Open University Course E282 *School and Society* provides a further example.

26. For example Andy Hargreaves and Peter Woods refer to the "highly insightful" and "influential" work of writers like Jonathan Kozol and John Holt (*Classrooms and Staffrooms* page 5).

27. See Mica Nava 'Gender and Education' in *Feminist Review* 5, page 70; Gaby Weiner and Madeleine Arnot (eds) *Gender Under Scrutiny*; Rosemary

Deem *Women and Schooling*. For a review of the literature on race and education see *Educational Review* Vol 37 No 2 (1985) - Special Issue on Ethnic Minorities.

28. Douglas Holly *Society, Schools and Humanity* page 25.

APPENDIX A

THE RADICAL CRITICISMS OF SCHOOLING

There follows a list of all the criticisms made of schooling by the radicals in the 1960s and 1970s. I compiled the list by reading through the radical literature of the period in its entirety and noting down every criticism, as described in the introduction (page 11). In order to present the list in a manageable form, it has been necessary to sort the criticisms into categories. This categorisation was not easy and raised a number of problems which, for reasons of space, I cannot go into here. Suffice to say that the categories which follow are categories of convenience and may not be taken to have any significance beyond that.

A fuller statement of each criticism, exact details of its source in the radical literature, and historical sources of these criticisms, have been drawn up and I will gladly make them available on request. For reasons of space they cannot be submitted with this thesis.

I have grouped the criticisms under five main headings: the social impact of schooling; the process of schooling; what schooling does to children; the content of schooling; and 'false conceptualisations'.

I. THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF SCHOOLING

A. *Schooling is Divisive and Discriminatory*

1. Schooling creates and magnifies differences
2. Discrimination: class, gender, ethnic origin, culture, age
3. Sorting, sifting, testing, judging, labelling
4. Stratification/division of society

(The Social Impact of Schooling: A. Schooling is divisive and discriminatory - continued)

5. Schools distribute life chances, legitimise inequality
6. Selection
7. Separate schools - private, grammar, single-sex etc.
8. Unequal distribution of resources
9. Restrictions on access
10. Divisive shadow of higher education

B. *Schooling is an Instrument of Domination*

11. School is not enlightened, benevolent
12. Schooling enshrines system's values
13. Cultural and ideological domination
14. Conceptual indoctrination
15. Schooling serves capitalist economy
16. Social control
17. Masses deprived of leaders

C. *The Oppressive Role of the School*

18. School claims a monopoly of learning
19. The myth that education = schooling
20. Only school knowledge counts
21. Diploma only proof of competence
22. School has replaced medieval church
23. Schools make false claims
24. Gulf between proclaimed and actual values
25. Hegemonic role of schools
26. Schools never say 'enough'
27. Schooling is addictive
28. School an end in itself
29. Schools deny their own faults
30. Schools are accountable to no-one

(The Social Impact of Schooling: C. The Oppressive Role of the School - continued)

31. New thinking about education stifled by the school

32. Paternalism

33. Professionals appropriate wisdom

34. Progressive schools no better

II. THE PROCESS OF SCHOOLING

A. Organisation

35. Control in wrong hands

36. Hierarchy, bureaucracy, managerialism

37. No-one can choose who they want to be with

38. The classroom a crazy arrangement

39. The sharp break at 11+

B. Ethos

40. Middle class ethos alienates

41. Peer group underestimated

42. Acquiescence taken to mean there's no problem

43. No commitment

44. Schools create behaviour problems

45. Gap between proclaimed and operative values

46. Mechanical system

C. Pupil-teacher Relationships

47. Too formal

48. Lack of intimacy

49. Teachers don't give love and approval

50. Sexuality denied

51. Lack of sincerity and authenticity

52. Lack of honesty

53. Lack of trust

(The Process of Schooling: C. Pupil-Teacher Relationships - continued)

54. Inequality

55. Fear and guilt

56. Dependence, domination

57. Favouritism

58. Lack of understanding

59. Contempt

60. Custodial role

61. Roles prescribed by forces beyond teacher or pupil control

D. Teachers

62. Class barriers

63. Teachers not members of local community

64. Too many bad teachers

65. Unstable/authoritarian personalities

66. Racist, sexist, snobbish

67. Conformist

68. Teacher training poor

69. Many teachers don't want to teach

70. The schooling circle: school-college-school.

71. Teachers aren't doers

72. Teacher professionalism

73. Teacher unions

74. Hierarchical structure of profession

75. Teachers' pay: poor, unequal

76. Teacher turnover

77. Class teaching undervalued

78. Discrimination against women teachers

79. Schools are unpleasant places for teachers

80. Teachers overworked

81. Demoralisation and despair

(The Process of Schooling - continued)

E. Methods and Practices

82. Lack of connection between means and ends
83. Low expectations
84. Slow learners aren't really
85. Intelligence, fixed ability, IQ
86. Streaming
87. Learning unrelated to child's interests and experience
88. Progressive teachers pilloried
89. Fallacy that order creates interest
90. Child's natural learning abilities not mobilised
91. Separation of work from play
92. Absence of spontaneity
93. Talking discouraged
94. Children discouraged from learning from each other
95. Passivity: 'sit still and be quiet'
96. Rote learning, memorisation, regurgitation
97. Once learned, soon forgotten
98. Periods, bells, timetables
99. Order and quantity pre-ordained
100. Learners' individual needs ignored
101. Class teaching inefficient
102. Children not allowed to choose activities
103. Children experience teachers' demands as arbitrary
104. Real learning mixed with irrelevant tasks
105. Pedantry, obsession with trivia; correction overdone
106. Teachers don't give pupils enough help
107. Questions, quizzing
108. Trying to please teacher is primary motive
109. Bad thinking and learning habits

(The Process of Schooling: E. Methods and Practices - continued)

110. No genuine involvement; pupils' views discounted

111. Hearts not engaged

112. Compulsion, coercion

113. Competition

114. Rewards and punishments, prizes

115. Fear, pressure

116. Examinations

117. Testing, grading

118. Labelling, judging

119. Compulsory homework

120. Exam preparation dishonest

121. Able students exploited

122. Prefect system

123. Private coaching

124. Progressive methods emasculated

125. Learning overvalued

F. Schooling is Divorced from Real Life

126. School out of touch with children's lives outside school

127. School divorced from adult world, world of work

128. Abstraction, academicism, book-learning, scholasticism

129. Schools won't let children out

130. In school nothing is 'for real'

131. Only motive for learning - action in world - ignored

132. Teachers are not doers in the real world

133. The 'all things bright and beautiful' syndrome

G. *The Material Conditions of Schooling*

134. Most schools too big

135. Large schools lack community roots

136. Poor architecture; drab, dilapidated buildings

(The Process of Schooling: G. Material Conditions - continued)

137. Overcrowding

138. Over-large classes.

139. Conditions are discriminatory

140. Unsatisfactory allocation of resources

141. Inadequate provision for under-fives

142. Resources wasted on bureaucracy and administration

143. School dinners are awful

H. *Schools are Resistant to Change*

144. Schools are out of date

145. Reactionary forces oppose change

146. Lack of democratic control

III. **WHAT SCHOOLING DOES TO CHILDREN**

A. *School is a Bad Place for Children*

147. Many children unhappy

148. Fear, bullying, brutality, violence, boredom, frustration

149. Psychologically harmful

150. Anti-life

151. Not enough play

152. Children denied fundamental human rights

153. Freedom of speech denied

154. Freedom of assembly denied

155. Freedom of movement denied

156. Invasion of privacy

157. Secret files, confidential reports

158. Denial of freedom of expression, clothing, hairstyle

159. Denial of freedom to form organisations

160. Justice affronted

161. Powerlessness of pupils

(What Schooling Does to Children: A. School is Bad for Children -contd)

162. Compulsion, coercion

163. Punishments

164. Degrading treatment, repression

165. Compulsory attendance

166. Boredom

167. School rules

168. School like gaol

169. Groupings decided by teachers

170. Physical punishment

171. Behaviour modification, drugs

172. Law and school in cahoots

173. Judgmentalism

174. Denial of humanity

175. Ageism

176. Adolescents treated like children

177. Feelings, emotions, denied

178. Kids right to fight back

B. *Failure*

179. Most children made failures at school

180. Potential untapped

181. Working class talent wasted

182. School makes people stupid

183. Social inequality legitimised

C. *Effect on personality*

184. Quiescence

185. Fear and guilt

186. Misanthropy

187. Dependency

188. Dishonesty

(What School does to children: C. Effect on personality - continued)

189. Worthlessness

190. Alienation

191. Education = becoming absurd

D. *Beliefs and values*

192. Indoctrination

193. Beliefs about learning and education

E. *The Stifling of Creative and Critical Faculties*

194. Critical faculties thwarted

195. Creativity stifled

196. Initiative not required

197. Ability to make choices, decisions, not learned

198. Convergent thinking emphasised

199. Imagination extinguished

200. School teaches bad thinking habits

201. Too much emphasis on memory

202. Too much emphasis on cognition

203. Talents misdirected

F. *Successfully Schooled Deny their Roots*

204. People who are successful at school are cut off from their roots.

IV. THE CONTENT OF SCHOOLING

A. *The Separation of Method and Content*

205. Method and content should not be separated

B. *Curriculum Value-laden and Culturally Biased*

206. Brainwashing

207. False information; stereotypying; mystification; ommission

208. Bad text-books

209. Culture and values are not static

(The Content of Schooling: B. Curriculum Value-laden and Culturally Biased - continued)

210. Culture and tradition appropriated by schoolmen

211. Popular culture excluded

212. Excessive reverence for high culture

213. No provision for cultural diversity

214. Packaging of values

215. Religion

216. Ethnocentrism

217. Curriculum is divisive

218. School's values are not children's values

C. *Relevance*

219. Too abstract

220. Schools get things backwards

221. Inert knowledge

222. Superficial knowledge

223. Not useful

224. Not interesting

225. Alienating

226. Adult in conception

D. *Curriculum Emphasises Wrong Things*

227. Too much emphasis on heads

228. Too much emphasis on memory

229. Information valued more than ability to find out

230. Creative, critical, expressive, imaginative, affective modes neglected

231. Learning over-valued

232. Excessive specialisation

233. Real education omitted

234. Real history omitted

(The Content of Schooling: D. Curriculum emphasises wrong things - continued)

235. No preparation for democracy

236. Self-knowledge not encouraged

237. Sexuality ignored; inadequate sex-education

238. Oracy underemphasised

239. Compulsory physical education

240. Military training

E. *The Structure of the Curriculum*

241. The separation and isolation of subjects

242. Tyranny of subjects

243. Compulsory content discourages learning

244. Curriculum not important enough to justify what's done to children

F. *Language*

245. Schools give too little attention to language

246. Obsession with standard forms

247. Linguistic deprivation theories

248. Discrimination against non-standard speakers

H. *The Hidden Curriculum*

249. Gap between proclaimed curriculum and hidden curriculum

250. Undesirable things learned from hidden curriculum

V. FALSE CONCEPTUALISATIONS

A. *False conceptualisations of education*

251. Education thought of as a commodity

252. Education thought of as a thing

253. Denial of praxis

254. Banking concept

255. Education as initiation

(False conceptualisations: A. False Conceptualisations of Education - continued)

256. Other false models - gardening, moulding, jug-filling

257. Education thought of as 'zero-sum game'

258. Predicted outcome required

B. *False Conceptualisations of Teaching*

259. Teacher as priest

260. Teacher as missionary

261. Teacher as walking encyclopaedia

C. *False Theories of Learning*

262. Denial of the active role of the learner

263. The imposition of meanings

264. Learning requires formal instruction

265. Learning divorced from real action in the world

266. Failure to understand how children learn

267. False distinction between cognitive and affective

268. Narrow conceptualisation of learning

D. *False Theories of Knowledge*

269. Reification

270. Forms of knowledge

E. *Positivism*

271. Positivism in social sciences

272. Behaviourism; psychometry; rat psychology; individualistic psychology; IQ; manipulation etc.

273. Conventional categories unquestioned

274. Exclusion of political, moral, aesthetic considerations

275. Linguistic analysis

276. Neutralism

F. *Deficit Theories*

277. Original sin

(False conceptualisations: D. Deficit Theories - continued)

278. Theories of intelligence and ability

279. Cultural deprivation

G. *Individualism*

280. Schooling predicated on individualism

281. Individual betterment confused with social advance

282. Social effects confused with individual traits

283. Equality of opportunity - myth

284. Elitism

H. *Consensus Models*

285. Unwarranted presumption of an identity of interests

286. Conlicts and contradictions denied

287. Functionalism

288. Standardisation and uniformity

I. *Dichotomisation*

289. Divorce of theory from practice

290. Divorce of content from method

291. Other unwarranted dichotomisations.

APPENDIX B

A NOTE ON 'CLASS'

In the radical literature - as elsewhere - there is considerable confusion in the use of the terms 'working class' and 'middle class'. We can discern at least three distinct usages:

Usage 1: An ordinary language usage. As Harold Entwistle suggests:

> ... a common assumption would be that class is defined by a richer complex of factors than power, income, wealth and property. Education, artistic taste, religion, speech, manners, dress, geographical location and size of residence, ownership of property and source of income all seem to mesh into that web of factors which define one's social class.[1]

Such ordinary language usage, being multi-dimensional, is somewhat loose and has a significant element of subjectivity: people's ideas of which class they belong to may not tally with the class to which others would ascribe them; and the criteria by which such judgements are made vary from person to person.

Usage 2: Stricter definitions of class made by sociologists, the most widely used in education being definitions based on the Registrar General's categories of occupational grouping [2].

Usage 3: The Marxian distinction between 'proletariat' and 'bourgeoisie', the former defined as those who must sell their labour power in order to live, the latter as the owners of the means of production. Socialists commonly equate 'proletariat' with 'working class' and 'bourgeoisie' with 'middle class'.

As Raymond Williams pointed out [3] the confusion of usages is historical in origin. Different meanings have emerged in different

epochs, with no clarification of terms ever having taken place.

Some Marxist writers on education have urged radicals to cut through the difficulties by adhering to the Marxian definitions [4]. But for several reasons this advice is not easy to follow.

(a) The words 'proletariat' and 'bourgoisie' have never fully established themselves in the English language, nor have they found satisfactory English translations. Their English usage has tended to remain curiously 'alien' and peripheral - sometimes used as terms of abuse, sometimes easily ridiculed as the jargon of naive slogan-mongerers, sometimes with humorous connotations. Although Marxists may know what they mean when they say 'proletariat', the trouble is that most other people don't. But if they say 'working class' instead, they are likely to be taken to mean one or other of the usages 1 and 2 above.

(b) The categories 'proletariat' and 'bourgeoisie' don't seem to connect very well with the accumulated sociological evidence. For example, the evidence on the relationships between schooling and class suggests, for radicals at any rate, that schooling systematically discriminates against working class children (usage 2) rather than against the proletariat; the latter would include many middle class (usage 2) children attending selective schools. If, as some Marxists argued [5], private schooling is in the main for children of the bourgeoisie, and state provision for the children of the proletariat, it is not clear that this offers the bourgoisie any *educational* advantage (although it may offer them *social* advantage) because in terms of traditional criteria, such as examination passes, the old Direct Grant Schools (which were open to the proletariat, though not

much to the working class (usage 2)) far outstripped private schooling, and grammar schools were on a par with private schools [6]. Nor is it clear that the advent of comprehensive schooling has greatly changed this situation [7].

It is true that sociologists have, generally, collected their evidence on the basis of usage 2 rather than usage 3. And so it is arguable that, had sociologists started their investigations using usage 3, they might have uncovered significant differences relating to proletarian and bourgeois schooling. But this remains to be demonstrated.

(c) A number of developments not envisioned by Marx - such as the extension of share ownership, both private and institutional - have tended to obfuscate the Marxian distinction between bourgeois and proletarian. Whilst Marxists have sought to accomodate these developments into their economic and political analyses (for example by pointing out that the extension of share ownership has done little to alter the power relationships of capitalism), it is not at all clear what the educational implications might be.

It is for these reasons that almost all Marxist discourse on education has readily lapsed into acceptance of the category 'working class' as defined in usages 1 or 2. But this has produced confusion. For example, in chapter 8 I examined the radical notion of education for working class struggle. This required a Marxist conception of the proletariat engaged in a historical struggle for liberation. But the notion also hinged on the concept of 'working class culture', which was not taken to mean proletarian culture, but rather the culture of the working class as defined in usages 1 or 2. There is an intermediate

class of people who are neither working class (usage 1 or 2) nor bourgeois (usage 3). These are people who are ordinarily termed 'middle class' but who have no significant income from capital or rent. Teachers are a typical example. Marxists tried to have it both ways when they claimed that teachers are proletarian (by Marx's definition) and yet were trying to impose their 'middle class culture' on working class children.

One way out of this difficulty proposed by certain radicals [8] was that such intermediate classes could choose for themselves whether they would align themselves with the proletariat or bourgeoisie. This introduces an element of subjectivity into the categorisation: it is consistent with the element of *consciousness* which Marx sometimes recognised as a component of class.

In this study I have used the terms 'working class' and 'middle class' in the sense of usage 2 unless otherwise stated.

NOTES

1. Harold Entwistle *Class Culture and Education* page 35.
2. See A.H.Halsey, A.F.Heath and J.M.Ridge *Origins and Destinations.*
3. Raymond Williams *Keywords* pages 51-59.
4. For example Douglas Holly 'The Invisible Ruling Class' in Douglas Holly (ed) *Education or Domination* page 108.
5. For example Chanie Rosenberg *Education and Society.*
6. Nigel Wright *Progress in Education* page 76.
7. See Jane Steedman *Progress in Secondary Schools.*
8. See chapter 1, pages 32-33.

APPENDIX C

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Summary

The aims of this research project are:
1. To review the critiques - particularly the radical critiques - which have been made of school education since Rousseau;
2. To disentangle the central themes of these critiques;
3. To examine what validity - if any - these criticisms now have, in the light of the accumulated empirical evidence, the developments in educational theory, the changes which have taken place in schools, and the changing social and economic requirements of education;
4. To assess the implications for schools in the late 1980s and '90s.

The area of investigation

In every era the education system has had its critics, who have been listened to or ignored, remembered or forgotten. But was the plethora of radical critiques which appeared in the 1960s and 1970s unprecedented? If so, how is that explosion of dissent to be explained? To what extent were those critics part of an historical tradition (Rousseau, Dewey...) and to what extent were they an entirely new phenomenon? What were the discernible problems in society and schools which sparked off this dissent?

What were the radicals of the 1960s and 1970s saying? Stripped of their exaggeration, contradiction and confusion (see *Radical Education* by Robin Barrow, 1978) did they have any substantial points to make? These questions need examining under several headings: epistemology; education and politics; education and society; theories of learning; freedom/environment/nature/individual development; curriculum and content; ethics; and others.

Do these critiques any longer have validity? In order to answer this question it will be necessary to consider:

(a) the empirical evidence, both that which was available to the critics at the time, and that which has subsequently been produced;

(b) recent work in educational theory, especially in the sociology of education;

(c) the changes which have taken place (organisational, pedagogical and curricular) in schools in the past two decades;

(d) the social and economic changes which have produced new pressures and demands upon schools.

As an illustrative case, it is proposed to analyse the experience of White Lion Street Free School in London. Its establishment in 1972 constituted an implicit criticism of conventional schooling. What were these criticisms, and what were the philosophical and ideological theories which underpinned the school? To what extent could these theories be justified? And what can be learned from the ten years of

Having worked through to this point, it will then be necessary to make a judgement about whether there is anything further to be said. (For example, if it is concluded that the radical critiques were vacuous and there is nothing to be learned from them, that would seem to conclude the research). If it transpires that the radical critiques are still valid, it will then be necessary to answer two final questions:
(i) what is the significance of these critiques for schooling in the 1980s and 1990s?
(ii) what practical proposals may be formulated which may be of use to schools, education authorities and other agencies (DES, examination boards etc.)

Methodology

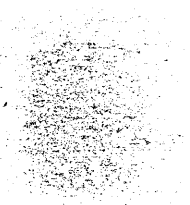
It is not proposed to carry out any significant empirical research, beyond the examination of, and information retrieval from, documents pertaining to the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s and to White Lion Street Free School.

The main burden of the research will be theoretical. This will be an interdisciplinary study, since there are clearly historical, philosophical, sociological, political, psychological and practical aspects of the inquiry.

Although the following stages will in actual fact be concurrent, the project will be divided thus:

1. Reading: there are at least 60 books or reports which have a direct bearing on this area of study (and a great many more with some degree of relevance).
2. Search through documentation of radical movements and 'Free School' movement.
3. Formulation of ideas, partly a by-product of reading, but, more importantly, involving discussion.
4. Preparation of drafts; discussion of drafts; final writing.

(Dated January 1983)



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To be included in this section of the bibliography the work must have been explicitly radical and propagandist in tone. Certain works which were radical but conformed to academic proprieties - such as Raymond Williams The Long Revolution, *Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden* Education and the Working Class, *or Douglas Holly* Beyond Curriculum *and* Society, Schools and Humanity *are placed in the main bibliography.)*

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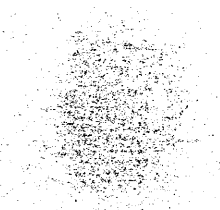

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